

REVENGE OF THE "SLUTS"

May 13-26, 1996

# In THESE TIMES

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# EDITORIAL

## LIGHT AT THE END OF THE MIDEAST TUNNEL

For years now, Yasser Arafat has moved the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) away from armed struggle while the Palestinian leadership implicitly abandoned its declared goal of destroying Israel's "Zionist entity." In this light, the Palestine National Council's 504-54 vote to delete these two obsolete ideas from their charter last month could be seen simply as an acknowledgement of the obvious.

Even so, many Palestinians took this to be an act of craven subservience. Israel, after all, continues to hold the West Bank and Gaza in a vicious stranglehold, while brutally attacking civilians in Lebanon in retaliation for the hundreds of small rockets fired across its northern border by Hezbollah. Hanan Ashrawi, one of the PLO's most eloquent and principled representatives, complained of a continuing "mentality of occupation and occupiers" on Israel's part, and of the absence of even a "minimal level of symmetry and parity" between Israel and the PLO. Given this, she said, and in light of "the state of siege and isolation Palestinians are living in"—as well as "Israel's refusal to implement its commitments"—the PLO concession seems more like "succumbing to Israeli dictates" than the carrying out of "a will or wish of [its] own."

It is easy to see how many Palestinians suffering under an increasingly harsh occupation would feel this way. (See Jay Murphy's review, "Peace when?," page 33.) Conditions on the ground have worsened since the Oslo accords were signed. Unemployment in Gaza is running at more than 60 percent, anger against Israel is rising, and when the PLO announced it was abandoning its commitment to destroying the Israeli state, Israeli officials still officially opposed the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Yet a substantial majority of the Palestinian people understood that the only alternative to what Ashrawi sees as humiliation is 40 more years of fruitless hostilities.

That this was the right thing to do became clear the very

next day, when in a gutsy move only a month before national elections—and with Likud hard-liners already attacking Labor as soft on the PLO—the Israeli Labor Party Central Committee voted overwhelmingly to eliminate its longstanding campaign platform clause opposing a Palestinian state. And then, for good measure, the Central Committee also dropped another longtime clause that called the Golan Heights a "strategic asset" that could not be abandoned. We believe that these reciprocal moves will meet with strong popular support on both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and will create momentum toward a mutually acceptable conclusion

of the peace process.

For almost 20 years, we have called on Israel to give up the territories seized in the 1967 war in exchange for peace. And we have called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Despite all of its limitations, we have supported the peace process because it set forth general principles that make possible the satisfaction of Israeli and Palestinian desires. The key element in the Oslo accords is a commitment to a "permanent settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338," which call for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and for Palestinian self-determination.

In 1993, we noted that many Israelis were still adamantly opposed to such an outcome. And even now, fanatical

Israeli expansionists hope for a "Greater Israel," while others, both in Israel and the United States, brainwashed by decades of propaganda about Palestinian "terrorism," remain blind to the Palestinian oppression that has led to the desperate acts of Hamas suicide bombers.

But the writing is on the wall. Final negotiations to determine the status of Jerusalem, the fate of Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the equitable allocation of water are about to begin. These will not be easy discussions, and if Likud wins the elections this month they may end in disaster. But we have always believed that the momentum toward Palestinian self-

determination can never be stopped, and that eventually Israel would be forced to accommodate to this momentum. Now the acts of responsible leaders on both sides have demonstrated the soundness of that view. Given continued commitment to the stated goals of the peace agreement, it seems likely that an autonomous Palestinian state will emerge at the end of this process, and that the 50-year drive for a Greater Israel by Zionist extremists will come to be seen as a tragic exercise in futility. ◀

*Despite extremism and violence on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, responsible leaders move toward the creation of a Palestinian state.*

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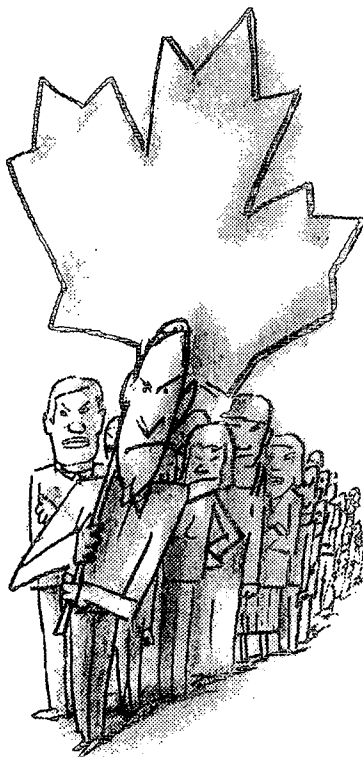


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## LETTERS

## Balance this

The "balanced budget" movement is a threat to our economy.

Our Democratic president and Republican Congress have both embraced the goal of "balancing the budget" on the assumption that government spending is out of control and that reducing the deficit will lead to long-term prosperity. Neither of these assumptions is supported by any evidence in U.S. history.

Instead of putting forth a sound program for addressing needs—like rebuilding our infrastructure—we are called upon to absorb the pain of budget cuts as a sacrifice that will yield a more stable economy for generations to come. The opposite is true.

Just as families and individuals borrow to invest in their futures—to pay for education, a home mortgage, a car, or to start a new business—our government has borrowed in the past to invest in the future of our people. Jefferson's

Louisiana Purchase created a big debt for a young nation but also doubled the size of our country. When collective security—and the security of the world—was threatened in World War II, we borrowed at unparalleled levels to pay for the war effort. The result was not just the defeat of fascism but emergence from the Great Depression.

Balancing the budget is the wrong strategy.

1. Every sustained period of balancing the budget and reducing the national debt has been followed by an economic depression in the U.S. (The last time was in 1929. It happened five times before that, in 1819, 1837, 1857, 1873 and 1893.)

2. In 1937, Franklin Roosevelt, at the urging of Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, decided that there was no need for pump-priming and opted to move toward balancing the budget. This sharp change from deficit to surplus financing had dire repercussions that resulted in a severe contraction of

business. Production fell below the 1930 level, unemployment jumped by 3 million within the year, and private investment dropped by nearly one half. (This was truly a depression within a depression, as unemployment rose from 14 percent in 1937 to 19 percent in 1938.)

3. There has been chronic deficit spending since World War II, and this may have prevented yet another major depression—the longest depression-free period in our history. The nine recessions since World War II have all followed reductions in the deficit relative to gross domestic product. The economic growth of the 1980s, moreover, came after increases in the deficit.

4. The current levels of debt are not as high as many would have us believe. Viewed realistically as a proportion of the gross domestic product—rather than as a misleading absolute number—the total debt is currently 71 percent of GDP, a figure that has been roughly unchanged for the past three years. (The proportion of debt held by the public is 51 percent of GDP. The other 20 percent is owed to other government agencies such as the Social Security Administration.) The nation's debt increased approximately sixfold from 1940 to 1946, and it was larger than the GDP in 1945, 1946 and 1947.

5. Many say: I balance my checkbook—why can't the federal government balance its own? But few know the unique way the federal government does its accounting: It fails to distinguish investment or the acquisition of

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



capital assets from current expenditures. By federal accounting methods, most major businesses, households and state and local governments would be "in deficit." To "balance our check-books," we would have to give up much business investment and stop all borrowing to buy a house or car or send our children to college.

6. Mandating a balanced budget makes it impossible for the government to spend the funds necessary in times of recession when human needs—for everything from support payments to public employment—increase markedly. If the government is bound by statute or constitutional amendment to have no deficit in such times, the situation will be worsened by even more cuts or tax increases.

7. The advocacy for balancing the budget is really directed toward a reordering of government priorities. One goal of those calling for a balanced budget is not the attainment of fiscal responsibility but the dismantling of government social programs.

We, the undersigned, are calling the "balanced budget" movement what it is—economically disastrous and socially calamitous. We call upon Congress and the president to abandon this goal and to invest the funds necessary to make America a more livable society by focusing on the creation of decent and secure jobs, a livable income, guarantee of health care, affordable housing and other pressing human needs.

Elaine Bernard	Norman Birnbaum
Roscoe Brown	Timothy Canova
Eduardo Capulong	Noam Chomsky
Sheila Collins	Eugene Coyle
James Devine	Barbara Ehrenreich
Jeff Faux	Herb Gans
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Robert Schwartz	Lynn Turgeon
William Vickrey	James Weinstein
June Zaccone	

## Writers bloc

Thanks for Karl Bermann's coverage of the launch of Publication Rights Clearinghouse, the collective licensing agency of the National Writers Union ("Infobahn toll booth," April 15).

One small correction: *Tasini vs. New York Times* is not a class-action suit, though we believe it will have the effect of one. With the settlement in March by *The Atlantic Monthly*, which now acknowledges that electronic rights must be separately negotiated, there are six remaining plaintiffs and five defendants: the *Times*, Lexis/Nexis, Time Warner, *Newsday* (Times-Mirror) and University Microfilms International. A definitive hearing is scheduled for June on both sides' motions for summary judgment.

Irvin Muchnick  
Assistant Director,  
National Writers Union  
Oakland, Calif.

## Burmese days

In a recent letter to *In These Times* (April 15), Unocal's senior public relations representative, David Garcia, claimed that the company's Yadana natural gas pipeline in Burma will provide "many immediate and long-term benefits" to the people of Myanmar. Garcia is correct in stating that the project means "more than just energy development to the people of Myanmar," but he is incorrect in suggesting that the pipeline will bring any benefits to the average Burmese citizen.

What the project means for the common person is more human rights abuses and a further entrenchment of the brutal military regime—SLORC—which ruthlessly rules the country and oppresses its people. SLORC, by the way, is Unocal's business partner on the pipeline. Starting in 1998, the project will provide \$400 million annually to SLORC and allow them to purchase more military weapons they can use to continue to suppress their own people.

Furthermore, despite Unocal's claims, the pipeline project is having a devastating impact on the lives of the

local people because of increased SLORC activity in the area. Since work on the pipeline project began, thousands of SLORC soldiers have moved into the region to provide security for Unocal's investment project. And as John Imle, Unocal's president, has stated, "If forced labor goes hand-in-glove with the military, yes, there will be more forced labor." In an interview with *Infrastructure Finance*, Imle attempted to clarify his point: "The troops assigned to provide security on our pipeline project are not using forced labor."

One of Unocal's partners on the project—Total of France—however "do[es] not share Unocal's confidence in the good conduct of Burmese troops," according to *Infrastructure Finance*. "I could not guarantee that the military is not using forced labor," says Total's Hervé Chagneux, the company's Thailand/Burma coordinator on the ground. Chagneux went on to say, "What is being done [by SLORC] nearby we do not know." Numerous reports from the area confirm Chagneux's fears. For example, SLORC security troops protecting a helicopter pad for the oil companies are forcing nearby villagers to carry water to them. These villagers are forced to carry the water daily, enduring a three-hour climb to the top of a mountain; they are paid nothing.

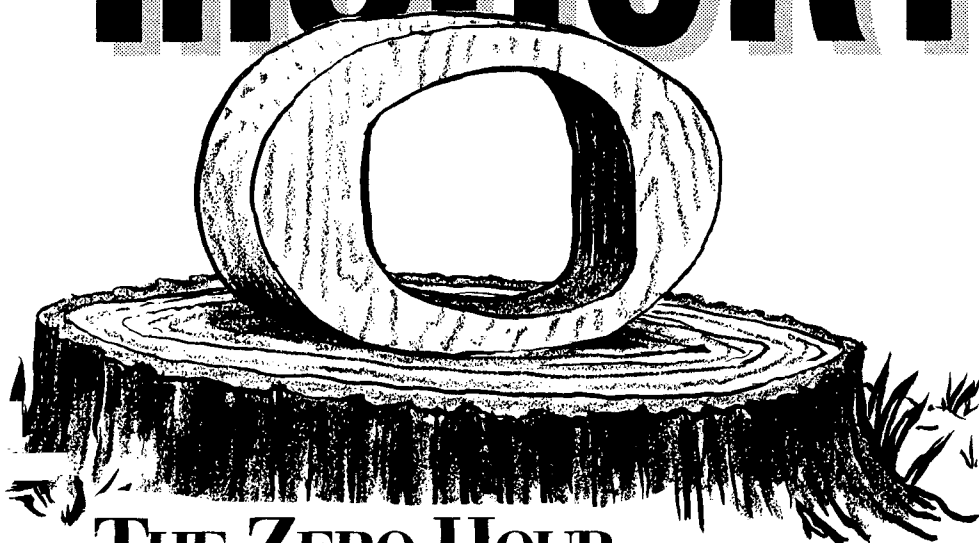
As for Unocal's efforts to provide assistance to the local people, even these programs may backfire and do more harm than good. For example, there are reports that local daily wage earners are being taken directly to do forced labor on the so-called new "death railroad" after they complete their paid work. And all equipment and livestock, such as pigs or shrimp, is subject to confiscation by SLORC once the oil companies leave the villages.

The point is that Unocal cannot control the activities of SLORC, its business partner, on this project. SLORC will continue to commit a range of human rights abuses, including the use of forced labor, torture, forced relocation and arbitrary killings,

*Continued on page 36*



# InSHORT



## THE ZERO HOUR

**L**ate last month, the Sierra Club's membership voted by a 2-1 margin to endorse a ban of commercial logging on federal forests. Coming after a two-month balloting period, the members' vote gives one of America's largest and oldest environmental organizations a policy mandate that most mainstream environmental groups regard as radical. The John Muir Sierrans, an insurgent group of club activists who also work

with such groups as Earth First! and the Native Forest Council (NFC), were successful after years of campaigning to move the club toward a zero-cut policy. The policy would mean an end to all timber sales on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, disrupting the business affairs of the agencies and many rural communities that profit from the timber sales.

The club's official statement announcing the results straightforwardly laid out the case for the ban. Just 12 percent of U.S. timber comes from national forests, the statement explained, while a 1994 U.S. Forest Service poll indicates that 47 percent of Americans oppose cutting timber from public forests (versus 36 percent in favor). Club President Robbie Cox and Executive Director Carl Pope concluded the statement with a call for the practice to end.

The announcement seemed to signal an about-face for the Sierra Club's leadership, which had opposed zero cut until the results of the vote had been announced. Chad Hanson, who led the ballot measure campaign, says club zero cutters "had been under a gag order. Now [members] will be able to use the club's name to lobby for zero-cut legislation."

Pope acknowledges that zero-growth proponents were denied the club's official imprimatur, but says that this policy never amounted to a gag order. "Nobody was free to use the Sierra Club name on behalf of a policy which the Sierra Club had not adopted. [Zero cut supporters] weren't being gagged as individuals," Pope says.

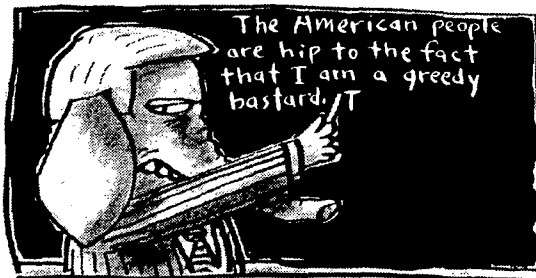
Though national board member David Brower had written a ballot measure statement in support of zero cut, most of the board, like the leadership, opposed the policy. However,

## Welfare as we know it

IT'S NOT SURPRISING TO HEAR THAT 93 PERCENT OF ALL AMERICANS—and 88 percent of those receiving welfare—believe the welfare system must be changed, according to a new survey by the Public Agenda Foundation. The foundation, set up in 1975 by pollster Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, tracks what Americans think about major public issues.

But most Americans don't buy the conservative line on what's wrong with welfare. Only 14 percent oppose the system because "it costs too much tax money." Sixty-five percent of respondents believe the worst thing about welfare is that "it encourages people to adopt the wrong lifestyle and values." What's more, 85 percent of Americans say that they would be satisfied with the welfare system if recipients were "required to do something in exchange for their benefits—even if it was just raking leaves or cleaning roads."

Most Americans also don't share the Republicans' scorn for government solutions, the survey found. Of those polled, 77 percent believe the government should provide child care while mothers on welfare work or go to school.—Joel Bleifuss



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# PPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

## Long live the king 4.3

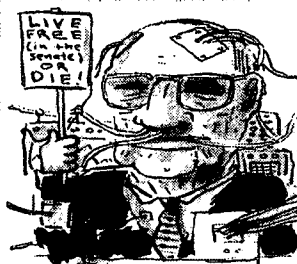
Even though another child-support scofflaw has eclipsed his achievement as the so-called king of the deadbeat dads, Jeffrey Nichols refuses to give up the title, the Associated Press notes in a recent report. "I'm still the king," Nichols told reporters. "Once and always the king." Indeed, Nichols now hopes to become a spokesman for angry and "oppressed" divorced men, and says he'd like to host a radio talk show, which would take on topics ranging from "fanatical" feminism to gender bias in the courts. "What I'm trying to do is use my notoriety and bad name for a more common good," Nichols explained.

## Perked up 3.2

It's a strange sort of life-support mechanism: According to *Newsweek*

magazine, a good number of North Carolina voters think 93-year-old Sen. Strom Thurmond will die if he's voted out of office in the fall elections.

"The blunt fact is that the Senate is, in effect, Thurmond's nursing



home," *Newsweek* explained. "Thanks to the perks of office, the only thing he must do alone is dress in the morning and go to bed at night."

## Deadly dull 7.2

India seems to have fallen into a kind of democratic doldrums, according to the Associated Press. One AP report noted, almost laconically, that in the late April

election season, "Five people were killed and scores injured in violence at the polls, but the disturbances were far less widespread than in previous elections, reflecting a dull campaign that lacked passionate issues." After the initial AP report, however, the death toll rose considerably—indicating, perhaps, a sudden resurgence of political interest among the Indian populace.

## Sheep dip 6.3

Four legs good; two legs—maybe not. You may remember French film star Brigitte Bardot's thwarted attempts to send dog and cat food to starving Bosnian pets—without thinking to send people food to their owners as well.

Now Bardot, a fervent "animal rights" activist married to a prominent French neo-Nazi, has launched a campaign against Muslim immigrants, inveighing loudly against the "Muslim overflow" and the "atrocious" Muslim ritual sacrifice of sheep. If such "atrocities" continue, Reuters reports, Bardot has threatened to emigrate—though, presumably, not to Algeria.

political style of the club's leadership. "My impression is that people want the club to take an offensive stance. People are tired of seeing their national forests logged and the environmental movement in a defensive posture."

"The vote was a complete repudiation of Sierra Club staff and directors who were willing to hold a compromise posture," NFC Executive Director Tim Hermach says.

The board previously endorsed the end of all ancient forest logging, a position zero cutters say was meant to blunt their unsuccessful 1994 ballot drive. And club leaders went on to contradict this policy in March, endorsing a timber rider fix that called for some cutting of ancient forests.

"There are people who believe that as a matter of principle no environmental organization should ever compromise," Pope says. "I don't think that's what the members were voting for."

In their statement, Cox and Pope said the new position will not change the club's "continued advocacy for ... incremental legislative approaches to end or restrict logging. ... This ballot measure simply commits the Sierra Club to support federal legislation that bans all commercial logging on public lands, when and if it is introduced."

"I think there's much less here than meets the eye," Pope says of the vote. Hermach, for his part, says it was "the heavyweight bout for the championship of the world in the environmental movement." But, he adds, "I have no expectation the club staff will honor this policy."

For the club's grass-roots members, Hanson says, "the question is not if but when zero-cut legislation is introduced. The main thing is there are thousands of activists who will work on this issue and very strongly want to promote legislation."

Nor will the Sierra Club be the only group to get this kind of message from its grass-roots membership, Hanson adds. "I really think this is going to reinvigorate the grass-roots environmental community, both inside and outside the national groups. It's going to be contagious." —Patrick Mazza

only one of zero cutters' four board nominees won (though two were close runners-up), which club officials say indicates that members are looking at more than federal logging policy. Some critics also say the impact of the vote is limited because just 10 percent of club members participated—though that figure is actually a high turnout for club elections.

And club leaders remain divided over what the vote means for the club's long-term policy on federal forests. "The membership decided they no longer trusted the U.S. Forest Service to cut any trees," Pope says. "This should be a sign that a relatively large body of

American opinion is now shifting decisively against the Forest Service."

The timber rider, which suspended environmental laws on public forests, "is having a huge effect," Pope adds. "The persons who have most of the responsibility for the fact this passed are Mark Hatfield and Slade Gorton [the two senators who authored the rider]."

"The rider helped, but it wasn't the main thing," Hanson says. He says that a recent nine-week tour in which he and fellow zero-cut advocate David Orr gained the support of chapters representing 300,000 members had convinced him that club members are growing impatient with the cautious

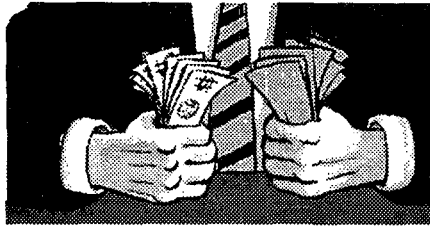
## BEATING BACK

**W**hen Riverside County sheriffs savagely beat a group of undocumented Mexican workers, national commentators were shocked and scandalized. But the beatings were hardly a surprise in Southern California, where racial tensions are often business as usual.

The reactions to the beatings have served to highlight the thorny question of how Latinos in the United States should assert their political identity. Prior to the 1994 passage of California's draconian Proposition 187, the Latino community in and around Los Angeles took care not to offend the white voting majority; they believed that anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiments would go away if they could educate Anglo-Americans. In the pursuit of reason, Chicano leaders and politicians found themselves divided in their efforts to avert the white backlash.

But the Riverside beatings may have put the "go slow and educate" camp permanently on the defensive. On April 1, LA television station KCAL captured a beating of defenseless immigrants by Riverside County sheriffs. The graphic videotape recorded Deputy Tracy Watson and his colleague, Kurt Franklin, repeatedly striking two suspected undocumented immigrants in LA County. The tape shows Santiago Garcia Pedraza being thrown to the ground and kicked. Alicia Sotero Vasquez was clubbed and pulled to the ground by her hair. The two were hospitalized.

The viciousness of the beatings triggered immediate outrage in the Latino community. The mainstream media, as well as the area's sizable Spanish-language media, provided detailed coverage. While press reports focused on the Rodney King beating as the point of reference and comparison, Latinos recalled another, less widely publicized episode of police violence. On June 15, 1990, workers supporting the Service Employees International Union's "Justice for Janitors" organizing campaign marched on Century City—one of



The Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) sees a pattern here. In a study released last month, IPS found that among 20 CEOs who ordered the firing of 3,000 or more employees, 14 received a 13.6 percent raise in salary and bonuses. This figure was 3.2 percent higher than the average pay increase for CEOs at other large U.S. firms, IPS reports.

But executive pay isn't everything. As stock prices for those 22 top job-cutting companies climbed on the day of the announced layoffs, the value of the stock options held by their CEOs rose to a combined total of \$37 million. So after firing those 40,000 AT&T employees, Allen found that his stock options were suddenly worth \$3.5 million more than they were the day before. —J.B.

LA's wealthiest business centers—only to suffer brutal clubbing attacks by nightstick-wielding police officers who had closed off the street. Thirty-six marchers were arrested and dozens of others injured—a pair of pregnant protesters even suffered miscarriages after being beaten. Public outrage over the attack soon dissipated, however.

Now Latino protest has a high profile in California politics. Demonstrators, human rights groups and several elected officials in LA called for the arrest and prosecution of the deputies, and publicized the frequent physical, sexual and verbal abuse of immigrants. The Mexican consul—suddenly vocal after a long, conspicuous silence—spoke out early and harshly. Mexican Consul General Jose Pescador Osuna described his government's reaction starkly: "It was surprise. It was sadness. And it was anger."

White conservatives rushed to defend the deputies' actions—and to vilify Pedraza and Vasquez as criminals who provoked the attack. Some defenders of the deputies wrote off the affair, arguing that given the sheer adrenalin rush from the long, dangerous high-speed chase, the deputies were reacting naturally. Civil rights attorney Stephen Yagman countered that if "Cops have to be treated the same as anyone else. There's no such

## Scum on the top

IN 1995, ROBERT ALLEN TOOK IN MORE than \$16.1 million as CEO of AT&T. His greatest accomplishment that year was the firing of 40,000 people. As for AT&T, it posted only a 1 percent profit.

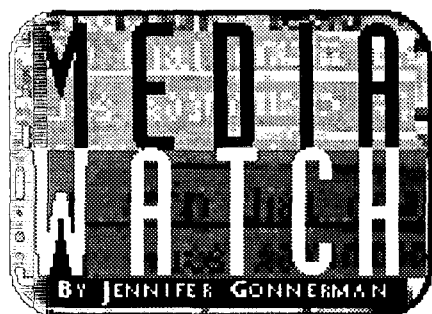
defense as, 'My adrenalin was pumping.' " Nor could adrenalin excuse the fact that the victims of the beatings were not responsible for the vehicle, or for the high-speed chase.

Demonstrations were staged on both sides of the border, with tensions riding high. At one pro-police rally in Riverside, a fistfight broke out between supporters and Chicano protesters. Border crossers, too, have become more confrontational. Since the beatings, many have started throwing rocks at Border Patrol agents and California Highway Patrol officers. This shift in temperament has prompted many Chicanos to expect to face still worse treatment by the INS and law enforcement officials.

President Clinton tersely announced an FBI investigation into possible violations of the immigrants' civil rights. And Mexico's ruling elite is badly shaken. Mexican consular officials weren't simply voicing their outrage over a single incident; they were also responding in part to the pressures from opposition politicians to get the Zedillo government to release information it had been gathering about the exploitation of Mexicans in the United States. Meanwhile, the Chicano community in California has made it clear that it will no longer suffer in silence.

—Rodolfo F. Acuña





## Everyone knows it's Wendy

For young female writers yearning to get their work noticed, the best career move may be to pen a smug essay slamming feminism. Last month, Wendy Shalit—a Williams College junior and the younger sister of *New Republic* writer Ruth Shalit—wrote the cover story for the Murdoch-owned *Weekly Standard*. In it, Shalit blamed feminism for the death of 7-year-old Jessica Dubroff, whose quest to become the youngest person to fly cross-country ended in a fatal crash.

According to Shalit, feminism robbed Jessica of her childhood. She tries to prove this claim by equating Jessica's mother, Lisa Hathaway, with



photographer Sally Mann, who has taken photos of her unclothed children. Worked up into a free-associative frenzy, Shalit asks her readers, "What right do adults have to take away these girlhoods under the guise of 'liberating' them? Maybe these girls should stop posing naked and flying in sleet storms to please their mothers and just be allowed to play with Barbie once in a while."

How exactly does someone of Wendy Shalit's tender age get the cover story of a national magazine? Shalit—who has already been published in *Commentary*—has held summer jobs working for William Kristol, the GOP strategist who now edits *The*

*Standard*, and at the American Enterprise Institute for Dinesh D'Souza.

## The rights stuff

The award-winning television series *Rights and Wrongs* has returned. Produced by Globalvision, a New York-based independent production company, the weekly series of human rights documentaries is now in its fourth year. Hosted by PBS veteran Charlayne Hunter-Gault, the series has increased its distribution to 150 cities—50 more than last year.

Getting *Rights and Wrongs* on the air has never been easy, however. According to Danny Schechter, Globalvision's founder and a former *20/20* producer, PBS has repeatedly refused to air the show. "Before they even saw the show, they rejected national distribution on the basis that human rights are not a sufficient organizing principle for a TV series," says Schechter.

"PBS was kowtowing to conservatives in Congress and to the right wing."

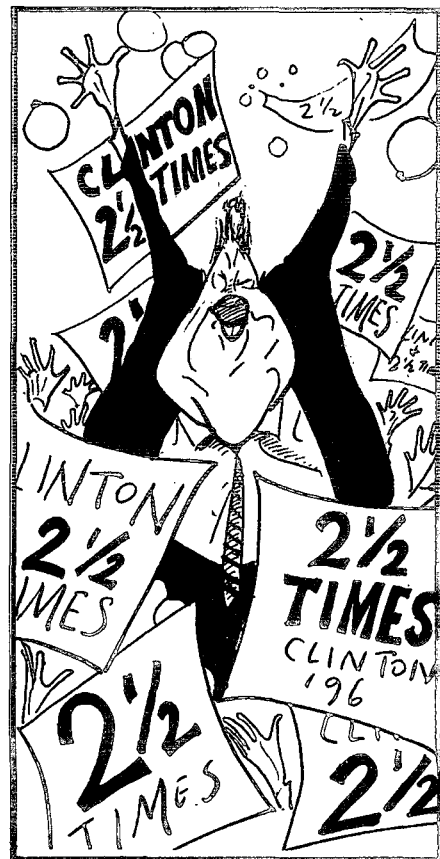
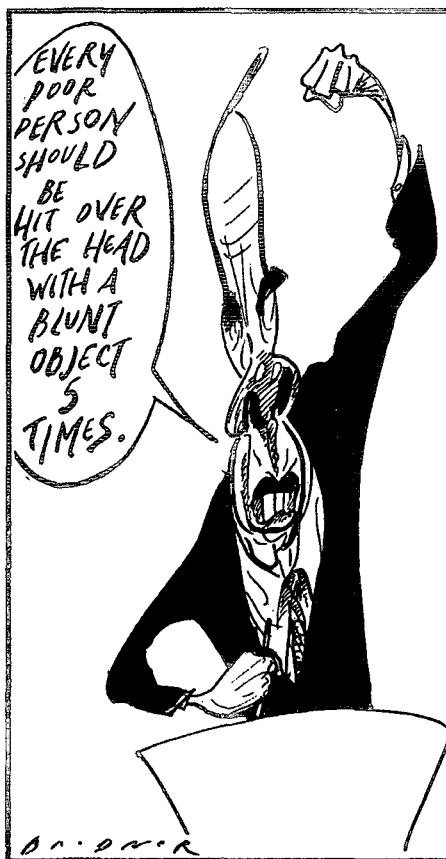
This week's show focuses on war-torn Chechnya and includes an extensive interview with Fred Cuny, the American expert on disaster relief who has been missing since he traveled to Chechnya last year.

## Northern overexposure

It's bad enough that Americans had to endure endless "junk food" news reports last year: the O.J. trial, Hugh Grant's arrest, the unveiling of Windows 95. But did we really have to export this news to other countries? These three stories topped the "junk food" news list recently compiled by Project Censored Canada, the sister of the California-based Project Censored, which just published its annual book, *Censored: The News That Didn't Make the News—and Why*.

## TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



The debate begins

# THE CENTER-LEFT HOLDS

As Italy's beleaguered caretaker coalition government staggered into last month's elections, perhaps a victory for Italy's battered left was predictable, as a simple reaction to the well-documented corruption of the Italian right. But the April 22 general election revealed a far more complex and multifaceted state of affairs in Italian politics—and encouraging prospects for that strangest of creations, a center-left coalition that could govern with some hope of achieving long-term political stability.

Not that the vote itself was without

polarization. Italians mainly voted for one of the country's two, sharply opposed political coalitions—the center-right coalition called Polo (Pole) and its center-left counterpart, Ulivo (Olive Tree). But this sort of ideological polarization is quite familiar in Italy. What proved more unexpected was the *sorpasso* (the overtaking)—the shift of political leverage into the hands of the Ulivo coalition, which garnered a projected 324 seats in the Italian legislature. Ulivo's victory represents the most coveted dream of almost three generations of Italian Communists.

This triumph pales a bit, though, when compared to gains made by parties at the extremes beyond either of the major coalitions. At one end, Fiamma Tricolore (Three-Colored Flame), a

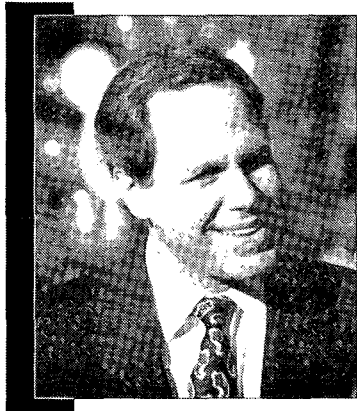
party of unapologetic fascists, registered a startling victory with between

7 and 20 percent of the vote in many southern Italian districts, where unemployment among young Italians is very high. Fiamma Tricolore's leader, Pino Rauti, publicly professes anti-Semitic and racist beliefs. At the other end of the spectrum, Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation), a party that attracts both leftists and conservative communists dedicated to social justice issues, received 8.6 percent of the vote. Powerful separatist movements that advocate secession both in the north (Lega del Nord, the Northern League) and in the south (Noi Siciliani, We Sicilians) grabbed considerable support at the polls as well. Lega del Nord received 10 percent nationwide; in industrialized northern districts, it took as much as 30 percent. Noi Siciliani received between 5 and 9 percent in various regions of Sicily.

In all, Italians cast more than 22 percent of their votes for fringe political parties. Another index of Italians' disenchantment with the country's major parties was the turnout for last

## WHO GETS WELFARE?

**MICHAEL EISNER**  
Disney CEO



Taxpayers are forking over \$300,000 this year to help Disney, Co. put on a bigger and brighter nightly fireworks show. Through a Department of Energy program called "Cooperative Research and Development Agreements," the research is taking place at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Disney gets the commercial benefit of this publicly funded research, and if applicable, shares developments with the armed forces.

The nation's largest corporations and richest citizens receive more welfare money than our social welfare program. In 1994, the United States spent \$104.3 billion on corporate welfare and \$619 billion on the military, while spending only \$14.4 billion on social welfare programs. Federal aid to corporations and wealthy individuals includes tax breaks, export promotions, loans, loan guarantees, debt forgiveness, below cost sales, interest free financing and other benefits. The current Republican Contract to America legislation calls for wiping out most of the remaining corporate income tax. These "welfare" and military expenditure policies are responsible for straining the federal budget.

The government would like you to believe it is running out of money for social welfare and it "needs" to be cut. That just isn't true!

Social welfare programs account for a small amount of the national budget. Aid to Families with Independent Children (AFIC) is less than 1% of the federal budget and, on average, no more than 2% of each state's fund. AFIC is not as part of the Contract to America. 6.3 million people will lose food stamps; 3 million women and children will lose Women Infants and Children nourishment assistance; and 3 million children will become ineligible for school lunches. These attacks are aimed primarily at poor families, 95% of which are run by single women. AFIC will be turned into block grants, administered at the whim of state governments. States will no longer be required to match federal outlays.

Women's International League for Peace & Freedom  
1415 Lane Road • Philadelphia, PA 19107  
(610) 362-7710 • FAX (610) 362-7707  
E-mail: wiplf@wiplf.org

Health Care • No Gates Have It  
c/o GILF

National Welfare Rights Union  
1107 Woodward Ave. • Highland Park, MI 48203  
(313) 467-0460

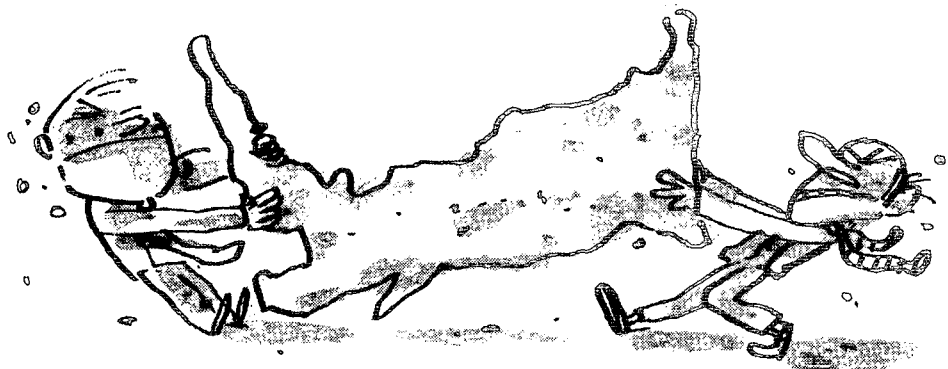
## Welfare Kings

SOME CORPORATIONS WILL BE FACELESS ENTITIES NO longer, if the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has its way. The 75-year-old Philadelphia-based group, in conjunction with the National Welfare Rights Union (NWRU), has kicked off a national campaign targeting 12 "welfare kings" whose government handouts are "draining the federal budget." Campaign poster boys include CEOs such as John Smith of General Motors, Michael Eisner of Disney and Ed Rensi of McDonald's. Rensi's poster explains that in 1992 McDonald's received a \$466,000 grant from the government to advertise Chicken McNuggets in Turkey.

"Welfare recipients will no longer accept the role of being America's budgetary scapegoats," says Cheri Honkala of NWRU. "We know that only \$14 billion goes to women and children, while \$104 billion goes to corporate welfare." WILPF and NWRU encourage people to buy a complete set of the 12 "poster boys," make copies and then plaster the posters throughout their communities. Send \$20 to Poster Boys, WILPF, 1213 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19107. — J.B.



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month's vote, which was an all-time low. Most countries would take an 82.7 percent election-day turnout as a sign of democratic health. But in Italy, which has long been able to take for granted that at least 90 percent of its citizens would cast ballots on election day, last month's numbers were a decisive falling off of voter participation, part of a long-term pattern of growing political disinterest.

So Ulivo will have to address the concerns of a population that is fed up with politics as usual. "A divided Italy emerges from this election," says Fausto Bertinotti, leader of Rifondazione Comunista. "Rifondazione Comunista has decided to allow our allies to form a government. We determined that to beat the right, and do what's best for Italy, we'd need to put aside our differences and support the new government from the outside." Without the support of Rifondazione Comunista, the Ulivo would be unable to form a government.

Of course, this sort of scenario—in which major coalitions find themselves unable to reach parliamentary majorities without the support of smaller parties—is not new to Italy, either. In fact, since the end of World War II, Italian governments have always been formed through coalitions of like-minded political parties. But the new Ulivo-led government offers an important variation on the theme: For the first time since World War II, the new government is not anti-Communist. In fact, two of the crucial parties supporting Romano Prodi, Ulivo's nominee for prime minister, are composed of ex-Communist Party members—Partito Democratico

della Sinistra (Democratic Party of the Left) and Rifondazione Comunista.

"This is a victory of the most accountable, responsible part of Italy's political landscape," says Gianni Perrelli, American political correspondent for *L'Espresso*, one of Italy's two largest newsweeklies. "This should inspire confidence for both our European and American allies. While there has been a turnover in the political management of the country, there is

also an element of continuity. This is because Romano Prodi is a former Christian Democrat and a solid, competent centrist. In addition, Prodi's offer of chairmanship of one of the chambers of the Italian parliament to the opposition coalition demonstrates that Ulivo will not govern against anybody, but will be responsive to the interests of all Italians."

The April 22 election also appears to have set the stage for a revival of the Christian Democrats, or at least their less-tainted representatives. In fact, in addition to Prodi, almost all the former Christian Democrats that ran for office were elected. As Bertinotti points out, "This migration of Italians toward the center is a clear expression of their need for political stability."

—Paolo Pontoniere and  
Mary Purpura

## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



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# THE FIRST STONE

## APOCALYPSE COW

By Joel Bleifuss

In the past month, the number of British people infected with the newly discovered strain of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD)—the human equivalent of mad cow disease—has grown from 10 to 15, with several other cases waiting in the wings.

The most recent casualty is the youngest on record, a 15-year-old Scottish girl who loved hamburgers. In a BBC interview, her doctor, Peter Behan, a professor of neurology at Glasgow's Southern General Infirmary, stated flatly: "She has BSE-pattern CJD and picked it up through hamburgers. Her parents tell me she had a predilection for hamburgers." Behan went on to say, "The potential for developing this disease must reside in millions of the population, because I am sure there are many people who have eaten infected meat. I don't want to cast a gloomy picture on the scene, but it seems to me that there is no person in the world, no scientist I know of, who can give the assurance that British beef is safe."

Three of the other new cases are clustered in Ashford, a town in Kent, where mad cow disease was first diagnosed in 1985. The diet of two of those victims was said to be high in hamburger. Graham Brown, a 36-year-old firefighter, frequently ate fast-food hamburgers, according to his brother Gary. And the parents of a fourth CJD victim from Kent, 29-year-old lawyer Anna Pearson, blame the death of their daughter, who died last February, on the hamburgers she survived on as a student.

Stephen Dealler, a microbiologist who has investigated the possible human risk from Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), is disturbed by this "cluster" in Kent. He told the British press: "The fact that there was a cluster suggests these people got the disease towards the beginning of the BSE epidemic, maybe in 1981 or 1982, when there might have only been about 200 infected animals. That is bad news, because it begs the question of how many more people were infected later."

Another microbiologist, Richard Lacey, has been the most outspoken scientific critic of the British government's handling of the epidemic. Lacey has warned that people who still eat hamburgers are "flying in the face of consider-

able danger." Lacey went on to say: "No one has yet been able to suggest an alternative source for this new strain of CJD. Until one is identified, we have an excellent correlation between the development of the BSE epidemic and the new disease in people. The time relationship is exactly right, the human disease following the cattle outbreak by about 10 years. What we are seeing is an absolutely predictable epidemic curve. In 1991, I predicted that the first cases of BSE-related CJD would appear in 1996." He stands by his forecast that by 2015, under the "best scenario," there would be 5,000 cases a year and, at worst, 500,000 cases a year.

The British government has branded the outspoken Lacey a left-wing radical. But Sir Richard Brody, Conservative MP and a former chair of Parliament's agriculture committee, told the London *Guardian* that the British Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has tried to smear Lacey. "When I suggested to the ministry that Professor Lacey seemed to be very persuasive in what he was saying, I was told, 'You do realize he is very politically suspect,'" Brody said. "I met Professor Lacey and gradually got around to trying to sound out his political views, and it emerged to my satisfaction that he was quite the opposite. But that is what they [government officials] do."

Here in the United States, government and industry are also busy trying to marginalize critics. On April 16, Howard Lyman, a former Montana rancher-turned-vegetarian, went on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to discuss mad cow disease and the potential danger it poses to the U.S. cattle population, and thus to public health. After hearing how cows are now forced into cannibalism by being fed the remains of butchered cattle, Oprah exclaimed: "It has just stopped me cold from eating another burger." That same morning, the price of cattle on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange dropped by \$1.50, which is the daily limit for a price fluctuation.

Soon after Lyman's *Oprah* appearance, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Rick Perry asked the state's attorney general to sue Lyman, whom he derided as a "vegetarian activist," under a 1995 law that makes it a crime to make unfounded comments about perishable food items. Specifically, Lyman had told *Oprah's* vast viewing audience that mad cow disease would "make AIDS look like the common cold" and that cattle ranchers feed "roadkill" to cattle.

The AIDS reference was hyperbolic—though perhaps not to British burger eaters. But Lyman's remark on roadkill was on target. Dead deer and elk do get sent to renderers, who grind them up for use as high-protein feed supplements for the cattle industry. Further, deer and elk suffer their own equivalent of mad cow disease, which is known as "wasting disease." Late last month, a case of the disease was discovered on a Saskatchewan elk ranch in an elk that had been imported from South Dakota. All these revelations raise



legitimate worries about the practice of feeding dead animals to herbivores.

Under pressure from the beef industry, Oprah asked the National Cattlemen's Beef Association representative, Gary Weber, for a repeat appearance in order to give him a chance to "clarify" the issue. What this meant was that Weber got another chance to repeat his previous misstatements of fact.

Weber had claimed that the United States has a "10-year history of surveillance" that has made sure that there is no BSE in America. And he went on to announce that "every possible effort has been taken to make sure [a BSE outbreak] never happens here." He is wrong on both counts. The surveillance effort Weber mentions has been in place for only five years, and it has been haphazard at best.

Some veterinary scientists who are experts in transmissible spongiform diseases like mad cow are concerned that the government's surveillance program is looking at the wrong cows. (See "The First Stone," April 15.) Government researchers experimentally infected American cattle with the version of the disease found in American sheep, and reported that such cattle do not go mad and do not develop the microscopic spongy holes in their brains that their British counterparts do. But these experimentally inoculated cattle developed other disturbing symptoms: They fall down and are unable to get up, a condition that is similar to downer cow syndrome, which afflicts 100,000 American cows each year. The only way to tell which of these cows could have a form of mad cow disease is to conduct a laboratory test for the infectious agent—or prion—responsible for BSE.

Consequently, critics of the government's surveillance program believe the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should conduct this test on the downer cow population in dairy states like Wisconsin or Washington—for it is those cows that feed most heavily on protein supplements that are derived from other cows.

However, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has refused to change its research guidelines to accommodate this knowledge. As of March 31, 1996, the USDA's BSE surveillance program had conducted microscopic examinations of 2,795 cattle brains. Researchers tested only 156 of those brains for the prion associated with BSE. They conducted these examinations in 1994 and 1995 at the USDA lab in Ames, Iowa—the only lab in the country capable of testing for the prion.

Given that the United States has 100 million head of cattle and that 100,000 of them are each year afflicted with downer cow syndrome, the current surveillance program seems woefully inadequate.

Art Davis, a veterinary pathologist in Ames, says the lab has given priority to examining brains from downer cattle, yet he is not sure, given budgetary constraints, how many brains the program will be able to examine in 1996. So far the USDA has no plans to increase the lab's funding.

Weber's second claim—that the government has made "every possible effort" to ensure mad cow disease does not

develop here—is simply not true.

Until this spring, when they were hit by the bad press of the mad cow scare, Weber's employers in the U.S. cattle industry have adamantly opposed any attempt to stop the practice of feeding cows to cows. On July 5, 1993, *Food Chemical News* reported that National Cattlemen's spokesman Gary Wilson told the annual meeting of the USDA's Scrapie/BSE Consultants Group that "his industry could find economically feasible alternatives to the 15 percent of feed now supplied by animal protein. However, the association does not want to set a precedent of being ruled by 'activists.'"

And on April 22, at the USDA's monthly "BSE meeting," industry groups and government agencies heard reports from "five working groups that were established to make recommendations for government policies regarding BSE." According to the USDA summary of that meeting, the "Feed Practices" working group was represented by David Boseman of the American Feed Industry Association. Boseman reported that the rendering industry, which produces the animal protein supplements used in animal feed, maintains that a ban on feeding ruminants to ruminants would "be devastating to the industry." He went on to suggest: "A possible solution could be to keep out of the feed those tissues and organs that are at high risk of having BSE agents. The cost of banning ruminant feed now versus later depends on risk factors which should be determined by science, not emotion." Recommendations from the working group will be sent on to the FDA, which will make the final decision on what kind of feed ban will be put in place.

"We are updating our risk analysis on ruminant proteins and ruminant feeds," says USDA spokeswoman Kendra Pratt. She explains that the agency is "working with industry groups to do a cost-benefit analysis of removing ruminant proteins from ruminant feeds. It is going to have an economic impact on the feed industries, so we have to look at all scenarios, to see what actions would cause what costs, and then present that information to the parties involved."

"What's a human life worth?" wonders Richard Marsh, the veterinary scientist at the University of Wisconsin who has spent years trying to convince the USDA to enact a ban on using ruminant protein as feed. Marsh believes that if the agency institutes a complete ban, the problem of surveillance will be moot: The disease, if it is now circulating, would be stopped in its tracks.

As for the danger to public health, if the U.S. cattle population is infected with a U.S. version of mad cow disease, and if cows in turn pass it on to the human population, we will eventually hear of it. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) decided last month to start tracking CJD, beginning in Oregon, Minnesota, California and Connecticut. The Associated Press reports that those four states are part of a new government program "to catch emerging pathogens before they infect too many Americans." CDC spokesman Tom Skinner explained, "It was prudent to do it this way. We already have these networks up and running."

# Maple leaf rage

*American-inspired new right policies rule in Ontario, but Canadians aren't taking them lying down.*

By Clive Thompson  
TORONTO

**A**s the driver of the sleek, gun-metal 1995 Lexus approached the Toronto hotel, you could see him hunker down a bit in his seat, as if trying to hide his face. He could see the line of demonstrators on the sidewalk, and had a good idea of what was coming. "Shame!" hollered the smiling gang of 30 gathered outside the hotel. "Shame! Tax cuts for the rich on the backs of the poor!"

As the car nosed toward the hotel garage entrance, a few of the 14 police officers present stepped in to clear a pathway through the crowd. In a quick dart, the Lexus driver vanished into the hotel's bowels, joining a hundred others at a \$700-a-plate fundraiser for Ontario's governing "Tory" Conservative Party—a government that is getting ready to deliver a large income tax cut, while chopping vigorously at welfare and virtually every social program in sight.

The Lexus driver, as it turned out, was lucky in mostly avoiding the scorn. A few seconds later, three young men in suits disgorged from a cab and, spotting the phalanx of even more youthful protesters, sized up the situation quickly, and broke into a brisk run for the hotel doors. Too late. Before they could make it, a group of university students raced over with their placards—huge, defaced pictures of Ontario Premier Mike Harris—and cut loose with giddy, jubilant cries of "shame!" "We're not Tories!" yelled one of the suits, as he raced in the glass doors, averting his face from the crowd. "We're just staying here for the night!"

This tableau—which took place in April—pretty much captures what has become business as usual for Ontario's Conservative Party, which is spending more and more of its time hiding from irate members of the public. And for their part, the Ontarians taking to the street are mostly having a great time—hell, they've got powerful, rich Conservatives hid-

ing their faces in public. Nor is this just the usual camaraderie of a rent-a-mob, professional-protester rally. That elusive, mushy-middle of the public has become a significant part of the opposition to Ontario's new, harshly neoconservative government—with protests ranging in size from small, regular events like this to 100,000-person-strong shutdowns of entire Ontario cities. If these people are in a strangely good mood, it may be because, after several years of seeing right-wing politics creep across Canada, they have drawn some sort of line in the sand.

Elected in a landslide last June, Mike Harris' government drew a line of its own in the political history of Ontario, one of the main economic engines of Canada. The Harris Tories are the province's first brush with genuine neoconservatism. True, the province was run from 1955 to 1985 non-stop by Conservative governments, but they were the peculiar Canadian phenomenon of the "Red Tory"—genuinely community-oriented conservatives who were unafraid of raising taxes to create a social welfare state. By today's standards, Red Tories were quite loopily left-wing, creating socialized health care and even giving workers the right to unionize, all the while spending bags of cash to enact their programs.

When Harris took over, Ontario plunged headlong into the neocon crusade to get government out of the business of government. Propelled to power by the dismal performance of an avowedly leftist New Democratic Party government, the Harris Conservatives won the election on two main planks: to reduce the province's sizable debt by massively downsizing spending, and to hand people a 30 percent income tax cut. The marketplace would now rule: "Ontario is now open for business," Harris announced after the election.

He wasn't bluffing. By the spring of 1996—in only eight months—Harris had announced a staggering \$8 billion in





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cuts over the next three years, representing 5 percent of the province's annual budget of \$56 billion. The cuts touched virtually every realm of state involvement in people's lives.

Welfare payments were reduced by 21.6 percent, leaving single adults with about US\$450 a month to live on.

Thirty-five hospitals were slated to close, and 13,000 public servants were targeted for layoffs. Education budgets were slashed by \$400 million, pushing up teachers' workloads; the province's traditionally cheap university tuition increased 20 percent. Harris' government also scuttled a long-fought-for anti-scab law, while instituting a mind-boggling array of user fees for public services—including, perhaps most symbolically, entrance fees to provincial woodland parks. "There has not been a restructuring of the provincial government on this scale for more than two decades," said the government's

Some of the more than 100,000 who turned out in Hamilton this February to protest the provincial government's drastic cuts in social spending.

Management Board chairman, David Johnson. "And it's long overdue."

But if people voted for change, it's debatable whether they voted for it to happen at such a blistering pace. The government has blindly announced financial targets first, and only later figured out what—and whom—to hack. In December, Harris tried to use his parliamentary majority to ram through a two-inch-thick "omnibus" bill that would enact many of his cuts. At 200 pages, the bill was so huge that neither he nor his ministers had even read the entire document: "I'm not an expert," he gamely admitted when questioned on its details. By normal laws of political physics, it should have taken nine months to pass such a bloated piece of legislation, but Harris did it in four weeks. It was only after a wildcat parliamentary sit-in by opposition members that the Conservatives agreed to hold a meager two weeks of public hearings on the bill. "Democracy is slow, and it's expensive," says Alvin Curling, the opposition member of the Liberal Party who led the sit-in. "This government's trying to make it fast and cheap."

Indeed, Harris seems at times to scorn democratic inclusion, at least when it comes to Ontario's traditional liberal constituencies: He's the first Ontario premier ever to openly admit that he doesn't really care about the people who didn't vote for him. And with his base of support mostly in suburbs and small-town southern Ontario, Harris—like U.S. Republicans—openly disassociates himself from the ills of larger cities, where welfare and other social programs are most in need. It's an attitude that has mortified the few older Red Tories who are still in government. Morley Kells, an Ontario Conservative member of parliament since 1971, recounted in a *Toronto Star* op-ed piece how a senior Harris adviser, after the election, pronounced the terms of victory: "We won this by ourselves," said the adviser, "and we owe nothing to anybody and are beholden to nobody."

That isn't quite true. Harris, in fact, owes a fair bit of his success to a number of people—in particular, to the U.S. and Canada's increasingly hybridized networks of conservative thought. Many argue that a good part of Harris' success lay in his folksy sloganeering: His slate was called "The Common Sense Revolution," and was laid out in plain language in a handbook that he toted with him wherever he went. The Common Sense Revolution was drafted by Tom Long, the sharpest of Harris' many young neocon tacticians. And Long has drawn much of his tactical inspiration from the success of New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, who ran and won on an identical 30 percent tax cut and deficit-reduction campaign, with a

similar "Common Sense" tag line.

Long, it turns out, is an old pal of Whitman's political consultant, Mike Murphy, who helped design her campaign. Long and Murphy met at a Washington conference in 1989, where, as Long told the *Toronto Star*, they hit it off immediately: "We just became fast friends. We're buddies. We hang out a lot." After Long observed Whitman's stunning success over New Jersey Democratic incumbent Jim Florio, he got the Harris team examining Whitman's strategy closely—particularly her promise of a tax cut. Harris himself met with Whitman in the spring of 1994 to discuss her strategy. Two months later, he launched his own "Common Sense" campaign—and the rest is history.

Look more closely, and you can see even more links. Harris' governing style borrows a good deal from the methodology of the Contract with America: the frantic pace of legislative change, the open disdain for government itself—it's all there. But the open-border traffic in right-wing ideology goes still deeper: Newt Gingrich and his Republican wave took more than a few cues from Canada's own proto-populist Reform Party, whose success has been the greatest sign of rising Canadian neoconservatism. Reform came from out of nowhere to win 52 seats in the federal legislature in October 1993, coming within one seat of being Canada's official federal opposition party. Reform candidates rode to power on rhetoric bemoaning western Canadian disenfranchisement and Moral Majority-style outrage over crime and immigration. Neither of these phenomena exists to a significant degree in the Canadian West, but it didn't matter: The broader appeals to anti-governmentalism and anti-politics are what did the trick. And the lesson was not lost on Gingrich, who later praised Reform Party leader Preston Manning's approach and invited him down for a visit.

Harris also owes some inspiration to the success of Ralph Klein, a neoconservative who won control of Alberta in 1993 and commenced swift and drastic cuts to social programs—even going so far as to offer welfare recipients one-way bus tickets to neighboring British Columbia. Riding on a cowboy culture of heavy self-reliance, Klein's tough-love approach has won him high approval in a rural province that sees itself as devoid of urban social ills. Though Harris rarely discusses Alberta openly, his emulation of Klein's hit-'em-hard and hit-'em-fast approach couldn't be clearer.

But if there's one thing that makes Harris different, it's the level of active rage he has inspired in a broad segment of the public. True, he's still riding his electoral victory; nine months after the vote, his party was still capturing a healthy 40 percent in popularity polls. But he has nonetheless polarized the province, and all observers agree that public dissent in Ontario has never been so intense.

It began as early as Ontario's September 27 "Throne Speech," in which the government lays out its plans for the next year. At the beck of a scrappy youth group called Embarrass Harris—composed of students, environmentalists and general social-justice advocates—a staggering

5,000 Ontarians came out to demonstrate against the government's planned cuts. Flummoxed by the crowd's size and aggressiveness, legislature guards launched into the crowd with full riot gear and attack dogs, sending several protesters to the hospital. That day has since been enshrined as a potent symbol of the government's hyper-aggressive social attacks. "You've got the barricades in front of the building, and behind that are the dogs, and behind that are the guys with sticks," says Andrea Calver, an Embarrass Harris organizer. "It really didn't make the government look too good."

Since then, protests have become steadily larger and larger. In December, Ontario's powerful Canadian Auto Workers union organized a march of 15,000 people through minus 30-degree temperatures in London, Ontario. Two months later, organizers amassed 100,000 protesters and shut down the city of Hamilton for the day. "Harris used to joke that everyone out at these demos was being paid by unions to be there—but when you get 15,000 or 100,000 out, the joke's wearing kind of thin," says David Robbins, who helped organize the London protest. Other groups have been equally vocal: 35,000 teachers descended on the parliament to voice disapproval of cuts to education. "This isn't just teachers," says Dawn Smyth, a middle school teacher who attended the rally. "It's parents, professionals, everyone from across the province. Things are so crazy now that everyone's involved."

Indeed, the level of animosity can get somewhat unsettling. Calver has had people walk up to the Embarrass Harris table at public events and express a solemn desire to kill the premier. "I have to joke and say, well, no, we're not the 'Kill Harris' table, we're just the 'Embarrass Harris' table," she says. "It's pretty weird."

The rise in public activism has several roots—and part of it is simply a healthy public response to the astonishing incompetence of the government leaders. As in the Republican neoconservative electoral sweep, many of Harris' key cabinet ministers are rank newcomers to public office, let alone ministerial work. While they pretend to be populists, their public comments regularly show them to be almost hallucinogenically out of touch with the lives of "ordinary" Ontarians.

One of the worst initial gaffes was a social services minister's suggestion that welfare recipients could compensate for the draconian welfare cuts by, for example, "haggling" with shopowners to buy tuna for 69 cents a can. The problem was, you can't buy tuna for under a dollar—and when a handful of protesters tried to prove the point by haggling for a few cans, they were promptly thrown out of grocery stores and arrested. That same minister later claimed that a welfare recipient could easily eat for about \$90 a month (barely US\$65), the allotted amount after the cuts. When challenged to prove this, he released a menu that included eating plain pasta three days a week, without sauce, salt or even oil to season it.



Things got stranger quickly. Local papers discovered that the education minister, in charge of universities, had himself never even graduated from high school. The minister in charge of public transportation had made his fortune as a used-car salesman; at one press conference, he suggested traffic jams could be cleared up if “everyone just used their cell phones to call ahead and find out what traffic would be like.” The housing minister, meanwhile, publicly joked that “what I know about housing could fit on the head of a pin with room left over for the Lord’s Prayer.” Harris himself, when challenged to explain how taking people off welfare would help them out, pointed out the wonderful potential of slave wages: “I can’t tell you how many millionaires got their start in minimum-wage jobs.”

In the next four weeks, John Clarke—who helped organize the grocery-store tuna-can protest—will lead a protest at the house of the social services minister. “It’s one of the wealthiest municipalities of Canada,” he notes drily.

The Americanization of Harris’ platform is perhaps another major explanation of the rise in popular dissent. His insistence on imposing an income tax cut will require him to hack a whopping \$20.1 billion more from Ontario’s services in the next three years, nearly tripling the cuts he’s already made. The problem is that practically nobody in Ontario ever really demanded such a huge tax cut. While few actually like taxes, blind rage over them is a peculiarly American phenomenon—as Harris’ government has learned to its dismay, most Canadians are quite attached to a welfare state built by taxation. And every editorialist has done the math and realized that cut would mostly benefit wealthy Ontarians at the expense of even more hospitals and education funding. Those making more than \$90,000 will receive half the value of the tax cut, and the top 10 percent of income earners will receive fully one-third of it.

Plowing ahead and damning the torpedoes is another trope of American-style neoconservatism, and it’s been particularly galling to Ontarians. Anti-governmentalism necessarily entails a certain amount of anti-democratic behavior: By openly stating that he doesn’t particularly care for those who didn’t vote for him, Harris has given his opponents no reason to respect the government’s mandate. The Embarrass Harris campaign began its public war against Harris barely two weeks after the election, before anyone in government had even had time to do anything. At the time, it seemed to many—myself included—that this attack was far too early and would only discredit those who worked against Harris. But ultimately, that tactic proved to be valid—why bother respecting someone who doesn’t respect you?

The Harris Tories have vastly underestimated the power of labor in Ontario. Labor is a strangely public beast in Canada. Union leaders are high-profile figures, regularly called upon by the media to comment on major government actions, as if they were the de facto government opposition. With its origins in a century-old transplanted British trade-union movement, Canadian labor is part of the everyday

landscape, rather than an alien force from outside. Its strength has puzzled even third-wave economist Peter Drucker, who once called Canada “the last bastion of militant labor in North America.”

It was thus labor that made Harris blink, significantly, for the first time. In February, Ontario’s civil servants went on strike for the first time ever—they’d only been given the right to do so in 1994 by the previous New Democratic Party government. Their main issue was job security; with Harris aiming to lay off up to 20,000 civil servants, they wanted to both shrink that number and get assurances that seniority would be the rule in layoffs.

With a neophyte strike team, a small war chest and frigid picket-line temperatures, everyone was predicting the union would crumble within a few days. But they held firm for five weeks, lasting out not only the weather but also a gruesome picket-line rumble with legislature police that sent 40 bleeding to the hospital. By the end of the strike, Harris had agreed to cut only 13,000 jobs, and the union had emerged with its dignity mostly intact. “They said it couldn’t be done, and we did it,” said Leah Casselman, the union president. “They said our strike would be weak, and it was strong.”

But labor has had its problems—and they go to a festering root of dissension among those who oppose Harris. Unions had been accustomed to using the progressive NDP as a tool for parliamentary action. But the magnitude of the Tory sweep—combined with a recent history of conflicts over NDP-sponsored cuts to the province’s social safety net—left labor leaders stranded and unsure of how to attack the government. They quickly broke into two sides: one arguing they should work to rebuild the NDP, and one arguing that direct street action was the way to go.

As a result, labor did essentially nothing in the first four months of Harris’ regime. Bill 7, which reversed the NDP’s earlier anti-scab legislation, passed in late October with no serious protests of any sort. It took the early example of actions such as Embarrass Harris to show the way. “Things have been very divisive,” says Ron Pellerin, a national representative of the Canadian Auto Workers union. “There are some that are doing a lot and some who are still tying their future to the NDP. But for me, there’s no doubt that if you don’t rally and mobilize you’ll get sidelined.”

Harris’ opponents have until the next election in 1999 to figure it out. If they’re lucky, they’ll have a continuing stream of jaw-dropping one-liners from Harris to alienate even more voters. If they’re luckier, the vast majority of lower- and middle-income earners will realize exactly who’ll benefit from the 30 percent drop in income tax rates, and Harris may face a quintessentially Canadian phenomenon—an *anti-anti-tax* revolt. Until then, Harris and his supporters—Lexuses and all—will remain the first neoconservatives in Canada who have truly met the public, and found it ready for a fight.

Clive Thompson is editor of *This Magazine*, a Toronto-based political bimonthly.

**POLITICS**

# Minimum efforts

# S

hame on the Senate.

In its zeal to defend the status quo, the GOP-controlled Senate—at the urging of Majority Leader Bob Dole—is keeping 12 million American workers who earn wages at or near the minimum wage from receiving a sorely needed raise. But there is a silver lining to this sorry example of politics as usual: Dole's obstinacy is fueling a grass-roots uprising by the nation's poorest-paid workers. The revolt is starting to make waves in state and local politics, but it may have far-reaching consequences for the November elections.

"There's been a history of states taking action when the federal minimum has lagged," says Lawrence Mischel of the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. "It makes an extraordinary amount of sense." Ten states already mandate minimum pay at levels above the federal minimum, with New Jersey paying the highest minimum in the continental

United States at \$5.05 an hour.

Throughout much of the West—where, unlike Eastern states, voters have the power to legislate through ballot initiatives—community groups and labor organizations are collecting signatures to give voters the chance to grant themselves a raise. In Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Missouri and Montana, voters have launched efforts to put minimum-wage measures on the ballot, motivated in part by their failure to convince state legislators to do it for them. A crucial drive is under way in California, the state with the most low-wage workers and where the \$4.25 minimum hasn't been raised in five years.

Organizers there say they gathered more than enough signatures a full two weeks in advance of the April 19 deadline, guaranteeing that the measure will appear on California's November ballot. The measure calls for the minimum wage to rise in two 75-cent

increments, eventually reaching \$5.75 an hour by 1998. Nearly 2 million Californians now hold jobs that pay less than the proposed new minimum.

"Having this on the ballot will force candidates to fess up, to say whether they are for or against working people," says Richard Holober, manager of the Livable Wage Campaign, a San Francisco-based coalition of labor unions and community groups. At this early stage, many state and local candidates in California have not yet taken a position on the minimum-wage hike, but they will likely stake out positions on the ballot measure along partisan lines. California Gov. Pete Wilson, who indirectly controls the five-member panel that can set state wage minimums, opposes any increase.

Meanwhile, labor-community alliances are pushing ballot measures in cities that have the power to set minimum wages. Houston, Dallas, New Orleans and Denver are among the biggest that do. (Many states, including California, prohibit municipalities from mandating wage levels.) Sustainable-wage supporters in other cities, including Minneapolis, St. Paul and Baltimore, have pursued more modest goals, pushing for ordinances that raise the minimum wage only for workers employed by city contractors or companies that receive certain government subsidies.

Taken together, these local efforts to raise minimum pay represent a novel attack from below on the widening problem of wage stagnation and income inequality in the United States, says Steven Kest, executive director of the community group ACORN, which is leading and supporting "living wage" campaigns around the country. "Given what employers have been getting away with," Kest adds, "this is a way for people even earning above the minimum to register their outrage."

Progressives can thank Bob Dole for fostering this outrage. The Senate majority leader and Republican presiden-

*While Congress dithers over raising the minimum wage, grass-roots groups are using the issue to motivate voters.*

By G. Pascal Zachary

tial candidate is holding hostage a modest proposal by Democrats to raise the federal legal minimum to \$5.15 from its current level of \$4.25 an hour over the next two years. Dole claims to oppose the Clinton-endorsed proposal out of compassion for inner-city youths, many of whom, he insists, "are going to ... lose their jobs" following a minimum-wage hike. So specious is Dole's reasoning, however, that even Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, the New York Republican who will never be mistaken for a working-class hero, recently broke ranks and endorsed a minimum-wage hike.

As it turns out, the economic case for raising the minimum wage is overwhelming. "Many people mistakenly believe there is large job loss associated with a hike in the minimum wage," observes Gary Burtless, an economist at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. "The evidence doesn't support that story at all." Professional economists—not generally quick to sympathize with the working poor—almost unanimously agree that such an increase would result in the loss of only a minuscule number of jobs; moreover, it would reverse the steady decline in the real value of the minimum wage, which currently amounts, in real terms, to barely two-thirds its 1979 value.

Alan Krueger and David Card's book, *Myth and Measurement: the New Economics of the Minimum Wage*, published last year, inspired many economists to take a more benign view of raising the minimum wage. Krueger and Card, both labor economists at Princeton University, found wide-ranging evidence, in the United States as well as abroad, that raising minimum pay had little or no effect on employment levels, a finding that directly contradicts mainstream economic theory.

Faced with weak economic counterarguments, proponents of a minimum-wage increase have been able to concentrate squarely on the moral issues raised by the proliferation of the working poor. "There's a sense that people who work—and work hard—at least ought to earn a living wage," says Sue Bartlett, a Montana state senator who backs the initiative in her state.

But while public outrage over lousy wages is rising, "there's a real political question of whether we can convert that into votes," says Wade Rathke, the organizing director of the Service Employees International Union Local 100, which is backing an initiative to raise the minimum wage in New Orleans by \$1.75 to \$6 an hour.

Corporations, especially fast-food chains and small-business lobbies, are expected to fight hard against these measures, raising the specter of job loss and retribution against jurisdictions that put themselves in a "competitive disadvantage" against cities and states paying merely the federal minimum. Some conservative economists even argue that the minimum wage isn't very important, contending that minimum-wage workers usually receive rapid pay increases.

"The minimum really is an entry-level wage," says Carlos Bonilla, chief economist for the Employment Policies Institute in Washington, D.C. "The people who start work-

ing at this wage show large annual wage growth." Based on an analysis of data from the U.S. Labor Department, Bonilla says that a year after reporting working at the minimum wage all workers average \$6.08 cents an hour, with workers 27 years and older earning \$6.68 an hour.

To be sure, some workers do see pay hikes, but that hardly puts them into a pay range that brings much security. And this exposes the basic limitation of the minimum-wage campaign as a response to widening income inequality, wage stagnation and the tendency for the so-called Great American Job Machine to produce a lot of bad jobs.

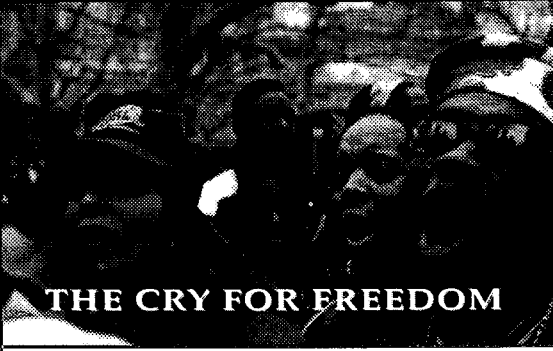
Minimum-wage campaigns are still a hopeful sign because they hold out the promise of meaningful wage gains for the worst-paid Americans and show that advocates of the working poor have some fight left in them. But the effort doesn't address the problems of the sizable portion of the U.S. workforce that earns well above the minimum wage but not enough to achieve even a decent life.

Despite its limited effect, raising the minimum wage is popular with voters; the latest New York Times/CBS News poll found that 84 percent of the public support it. And proponents of the initiatives maintain that, at the very least, the issue will bring progressives to the polls. "If people don't have a stake in the outcome of an election, they don't vote," Rathke says. "These measures certainly give low-wage workers a reason to come to the polls, and that's something right there."

G. Pascal Zachary writes frequently on economics and labor.

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**L A B O R**

# Service with a smile

**F**or most of its 75 years, since it was founded by an ethnic hodgepodge of downtrodden janitors in Chicago, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) got little attention or respect, even within the ranks of organized labor.

*The SEIU, already America's fastest-growing union, expands its plans to organize.*

By David Moberg  
CHICAGO

Most of its members were in jobs that offered little prestige, pay or power. They didn't have the heroic proletarian panache of miners, autoworkers and truckers, who in their heyday could shut down industries and make the national economy tremble. The union represented a grab bag of members—public employees, office workers, nursing-home and other health care workers, janitors, workers at racetracks and amusement parks. The union's membership also included more minorities and women than most other unions. SEIU members often belonged to locals that had

little in common with the rest of their international union, not even sharing a name. Though some locals were honest and militant, others were cesspools of corruption, often allied with the old-guard crooks of the Teamsters. The painful joke among SEIU staffers was that, to the rest of the labor movement, they were S-E-I-Who?

That has all changed dramatically. Now the SEIU is the third-largest and fastest-growing union in the AFL-CIO (with 1.1 million members). It is also one of the most imaginative, militant and progressive unions in the American labor movement, providing inspiration and ideas for a labor revival, if there is to be one.

SEIU transformed itself over the past 15 years under the leadership of John Sweeney, who brought new prestige to his old union last year when he was elected president of the AFL-CIO. Now Andrew Stern, a 45-year-old former reform leader of a large social service worker local and for 12 years the chief strategist of SEIU's brilliant organizing campaigns among janitors, nursing-home employees and

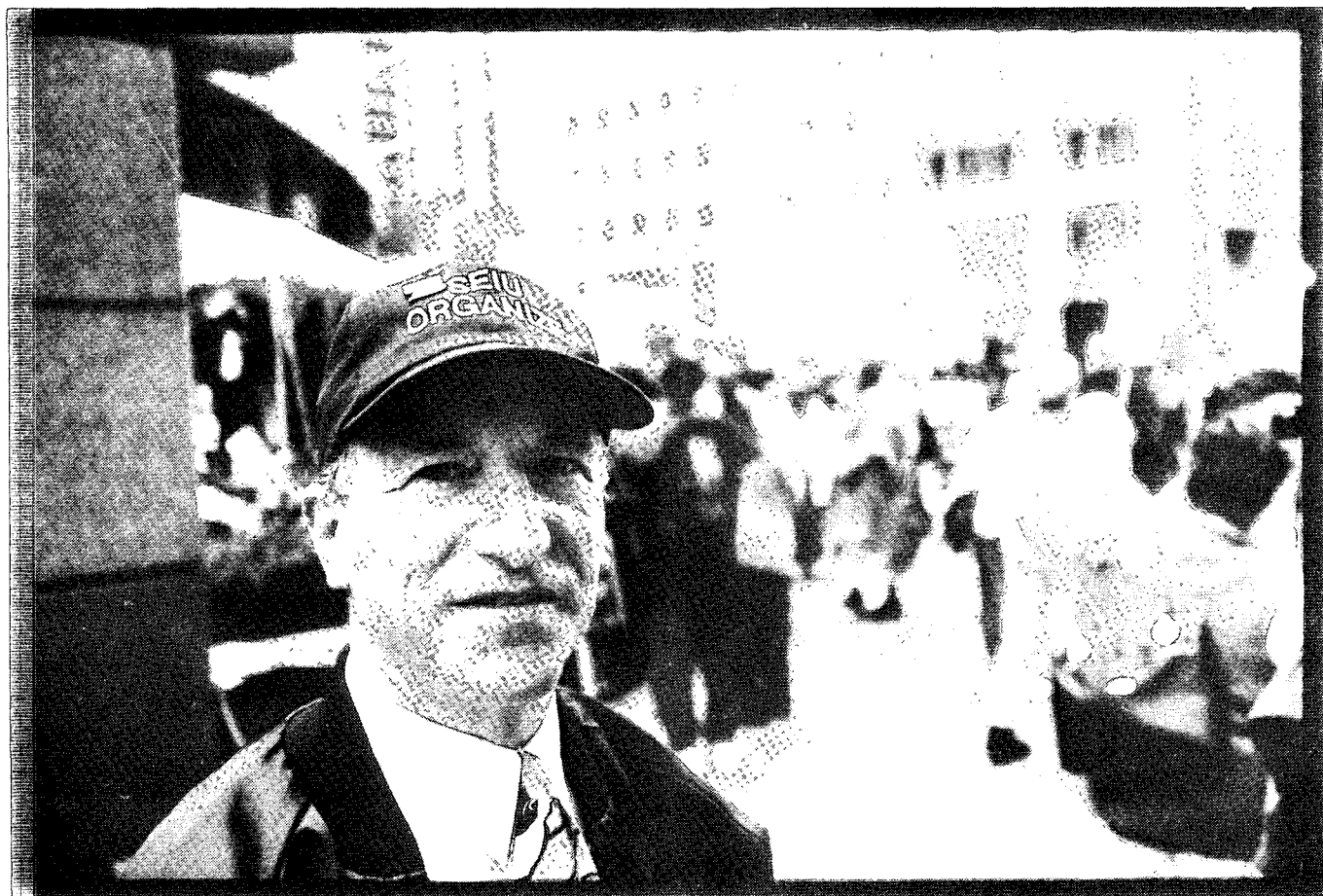
other workers, has taken the reins at SEIU. Colleagues describe Stern as passionate, intense and thoughtful. "Andy is an organizer's organizer," says Atlanta Labor Council President Stewart Acuff. "He thinks about it, worries about it, goes to bed with it, wakes up with it."

Stern wants to remake the SEIU "to fundamentally change how local unions do business, [that is], seeing their mission as building power in their industries and not simply bargaining contracts. ... I think you'll [also] see much more grass-roots independent political programs."

After Sweeney's retirement, SEIU's conservative wing, with its strength mainly in big-city janitor locals, moved to win control of the union, but Stern and his allies out-organized the old guard. Richard Cordtz, Sweeney's longtime secretary-treasurer and the interim president, dropped out of the race in March, ceding victory to Stern and his newly expanded five-member executive slate, including two women, a Latino and an African-American. The convention further strengthened Stern's mandate by reducing the conservative old guard to a vestigial role in leadership and by endorsing a new strategic program. The program, a remarkably frank assessment of union weaknesses and strengths, was developed over the past four years by the Committee on the Future, chaired by new Secretary-Treasurer Betty Bednarczyk.

The convention also struck a compromise on the thorny, embarrassing internal issue of whether leaders could draw multiple salaries from the union: Top officers will no longer be permitted to get dual salaries, but new executive board members will get standardized, publicly disclosed compensation for the extra work they do for the international—though they will draw more modest fees than those previously paid to some leaders. Much of the

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**SEIU President Andrew Stern at a recent rally in Chicago.**

SEIU President Andrew Stern at a recent rally in Chicago. rancor within the union has focused on one man, Gus Bevona, the arrogant, retrograde head of the big New York janitor local 33B/33J. Bevona had threatened to fight for radical local autonomy but ultimately settled for keeping his money—about \$400,000 a year all told—and diminished national power.

Now a new generation of leadership, sympathetic to Sweeney's emphasis on organizing and on promoting a broad social agenda, has full control. "John Sweeney was the great straddler," linking the old local barons and new staff and local leaders like Stern, many of whom were influenced by the social movements of the 1960s, observes a former SEIU leader. "Now there is the emergence of a new generation of leaders who don't have to straddle." Sweeney was the master of a "silent consensus" that broke down when he left, argues District 925 director Debbie Schneider, but Stern's campaign, however brief, finally established a public consensus on the union's new direction. Leaders of the previous pro-democracy dissident caucus rallied behind Stern—despite continued disagreements over issues such as direct election of officers—and were included on the union's executive board.

Sweeney created a strong, creative central staff for what had been a highly decentralized union—and used it to orga-

nize. (The union's best-known organizing campaign is Justice for Janitors, which has used public disruption and civil disobedience to gain leverage.) Sweeney also pursued coordinated contract campaigns among small, fragmented work sites, such as nursing homes, that are often hard to organize.

Though SEIU leaders intend to create a more democratic union and a "culture of participation," they have a long way to go. Most of the union's members and local leaders are not active participants in the union's main projects. In a 1993 union survey, only a third of SEIU members supported the union's organizing program. Sometimes successful organizing campaigns, such as the heralded Los Angeles Justice for Janitors effort, have been grafted onto locals without changing the structure of the local union or the outlook of its leaders or previous members.

"There's organizing internally and organizing new members," says Michael Baratz, director of the building service division. "We're woefully unorganized internally. We don't have the benefit of our numbers until our people are organized. I don't mean just paying dues, but having respect for the union and acting." Now, Stern says, he wants to take the last step of the process Sweeney began, by "bringing local union leadership more into that center. Our members and leaders want to participate more." And Stern wants to educate them, through action when possible, to support organizing as the key to their own power to improve their lives.

Despite its success compared to other unions, SEIU scored a net gain of only 8,700 workers a year through organizing over the decade ending in 1993. Because of restructuring and turmoil in the industries where it organizes, the SEIU had to organize 40,000 workers a year to compensate for losses elsewhere and still realize those gains. At the same time, the service sector is growing so rapidly that the union needs a net gain of 40,000 each year, or roughly double its current overall organizing pace, simply to maintain its percentage share of these growing industries. To increase the percentage of unionized workers and thus gain power, it will need to organize even more.

Faced with these pressures, SEIU leaders continue to step up the union's commitment to organizing. The convention raised dues for both the international union and locals—increases primarily set aside for organizing. But local unions still control the vast majority of the union's resources and remain the key to aggressive organizing campaigns.

"This whole convention was about trying to get locals to understand that they can't represent members at the bargaining table anymore if they don't organize," Stern said at its conclusion. "We're not going to get stronger if our numbers get smaller. We're not going to raise our wages when people down the street are making far less."

If local unions boost their organizing budgets from 5 percent of income to 20 percent over the next few years, and the international continues to devote at least a third of its budget to organizing, SEIU expenditures on organizing could roughly double to \$45 million a year, enough to at least keep pace with service sector growth. But the structural and ideological changes the new SEIU leaders envision could multiply those membership gains even further.

Over the next four years Stern hopes to recruit and train 5,000 "member organizers." Currently, union stewards see their task as handling problems in the workplace. But the new member organizers would be parallel union leaders, who see their task as recruiting new union members and building unions at other work sites. Now only about 60 out of 400 locals are actively organizing.

The union will continue to organize to build strength in local markets. A health care local is now targeting a wide range of health services throughout the Akron area, for example, and in Cincinnati, to the National Association for Working Women, offers a citywide non-union forum for office workers. Meanwhile, SEIU District 925 targets specific workplaces, especially universities and not-for-profit organizations, for unionization. The union is also using its growing bargaining power to ease the task of organizing workers; it has already won agreements from nursing-home chains to be neutral in organizing drives or recognize the union without the lengthy National Labor Relations Board election process. It is also beginning to use its political power to support organizing efforts: In its hard-fought campaign to organize ill-paid home-care workers, the union

has worked to establish local public authorities that can bargain with the organized workers.

Even where the union controls a big chunk of a market, it must use novel tactics. Nursing-home aides are easy to replace, so the union resorts to surprise, quickie strikes that minimize job loss but still take a toll on the employer: There have been 70 over the past year, as many as in the previous decade, according to David Snapp, director of the union's Dignity campaign to organize nursing-home workers in California. SEIU is seeking an injunction against industry giant Beverly Enterprises for illegally replacing 350 low-skilled workers in Pennsylvania who struck over unfair labor practices. To bolster its bargaining in several health care and nursing-home campaigns, SEIU has attacked government funding for rogue corporations, conducted demonstrations and civil disobedience, revealed damaging information about companies to financial markets, agitated for increased regulation, and mobilized consumer and patient groups to fight for better care. To win gains for janitors, the union typically pressures high-profile developers or corporate giants, like Apple, that hire building service contractors in lieu of going after the janitorial firms themselves.

The union is trying to organize at a time when the world of service work is rapidly changing: National, even transnational, corporate chains of janitorial services, nursing homes, HMOs and other employers of SEIU members are grabbing larger shares of their markets. As they do so, they create growing pressures to "restructure" in ways that deskill the work, weaken workers' bargaining position and greatly enrich the owners. To succeed in recruiting new members and winning stronger contracts, Stern thinks, the union will have to form more partnerships among locals—and between locals and the international—to confront these new service corporations. Also, especially in health care, SEIU is fighting for better patient care by allying with patient and consumer groups. In one key alliance, SEIU has joined forces with the union health care trust funds that are often big clients of HMOs, such as Kaiser. (SEIU is embroiled in a major battle with the formerly progressive, union-backed HMO that is now behaving much like other profit-driven HMOs.) With its allies, the union presses for tighter state regulations and bargains for "patient care" committees that involve workers in key decisions, such as determining adequate levels of staff.

The union's new leaders also face big internal obstacles to their ambitious organizing plan. First, it won't be a snap to organize members and to persuade them that, with all the competing demands on their time, it's worth working more for their union. Members already feel a certain ambivalence toward the union: They give SEIU high marks for fighting, but low marks on winning what they need. Local officers also are often resistant: Why risk the local's money on an organizing drive that might lose and then

*Continued on page 36*



## GENDER POLITICS

# "Sluts" and suits

A

junior high school girl in Petaluma, Calif., known as Jane Doe was the target of an ugly and persistent rumor. In the fall of 1990, when she was in the seventh grade, classmates spread the word that Doe had a hot dog in her pants. Throughout the year Doe was repeatedly called a "hot dog bitch" and a "slut." And the rumor did not dissipate over the summer. When Doe returned to school the following year, the comments kept coming. One day a classmate stood up in the middle of English class and blatantly said, "This question is for Jane. Did you have sex with a hot dog?" The entire class laughed. Doe ran out in tears.

Doe's experience is far from rare. In fact, 42 percent of girls have had sexual rumors spread about them, according to a 1993 nationwide poll conducted for the American Association of University Women. In

another survey, conducted by Nan Stein of Wellesley College in conjunction with the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund and distributed through *Seventeen* magazine, 89 percent of the teenage respondents said they had been the targets of unwanted sexual comments, gestures or looks. (Eighty-three percent said they had been touched, grabbed or pinched.) In two-thirds of the cases, other people were present.

The school "slut" typically endures cruel and sneering comments—"slut" is often interchangeable with "whore" and "bitch"—as she walks down the hallway, rides the school bus and gathers books from her locker. She is publicly humiliated in the classroom and cafeteria, targeted in boys' bathroom graffiti and late-night prank phone calls. Teachers, generally speaking, do not intervene; they consider this behavior normal for teenagers.

Consider "Marcy," a Catholic girl from Queens then in the ninth grade, who was hanging out at a friend's house one evening when she drank so much she blacked out. A

classmate raped her and then spread the news that they had had sex. Marcy, now a college sophomore, comments matter-of-factly that within hours she acquired a reputation as a "slut." "They'd call out 'slut' to me in the halls," she recalls. "There was graffiti." Everybody in the school knew about her, in all the grades. Marcy's reputation as a "slut" is so legendary that the new crop of incoming students at her old high school hears all about her each year.

I know what it feels like: I myself had been the subject of painful, mocking gossip in the spring of ninth grade, 12 years ago. A friend felt betrayed after I dated a guy she'd had her eye on. In revenge, she spread the rumor that I was a "slut." It was my first lesson in the sexual double standard: Boys who bragged about their sexual status were routinely glorified, while I was belittled to an extraordinary degree. My sexuality (real or imagined) was, in effect, policed.

So what's a high school "slut" to do? Unfortunately, the solutions currently advocated by educators, many of whom consider "slut"-bashing a form of sexual harassment, are ineffective or impractical.

The NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund counsels schools to develop and enforce sexual harassment policies, so that a strong message is conveyed that verbal harassment will not be tolerated, that students know how to make a complaint and that punishments are speedy but fair. A student who is harassed by another student is advised to confront the harasser, if she feels safe and comfortable doing so. She is encouraged to write a letter to the harasser that describes the behavior, explains that it bothers her and says that she wants it to stop. This is said to be empowering and therapeutic for the student who is harassed.

But it can be incredibly difficult for anyone, let alone a

*Are lawsuits  
the answer to  
student-to-  
student sexual  
harassment?*

By Leora Tanenbaum

child or adolescent, to confront her harasser personally. A group of 15 girls from Santa Clara High School in Santa Clara, Calif., recently banded together to complain to their school officials about boys who circulated sexual rumors, grabbed them and spit on them—and got the offenders suspended. But very often the one who is harassed is on her own, without any kind of support. In any event, in far too many cases school administrators are uninterested in developing or enforcing policies because they don't consider sexual harassment (verbal or physical) a serious problem. Even when girls tell a teacher or administrator about incidents of harassment, nothing happens in 45 percent of the cases, according to the *Seven-teen* study.

Recognizing these realities, and facing school officials who are not as quick to punish harassers as the Santa Clara officials were, a handful of "sluts" have chosen the legal route. In 1992, the United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled that students can collect monetary damages from schools for sexual harassment. The ruling in that case, *Franklin vs. Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools*, applied to a student who alleged that a teacher made unwelcome sexual advances toward her during her sophomore year in high school, but it paved the way for student-to-student sexual harassment charges as well.

As a form of sexual harassment, the taunting of "sluts" violates Title IX of the 1972 amendments to the Education Act, which guarantees equal access to education. Those who say they've been harassed don't have to file a complaint with the government; they can take their claims directly to court. Students who believe school officials have failed to prevent sexual harassment can file lawsuits against school districts within 180 days from the date of the last incident.

Since the Franklin ruling, several girls have already sued their school districts and settled out of court—such as a Midwestern girl whose name appeared on a list of the "25 most fuckable girls" that classmates circulated around her school. Her settlement, in 1993, was a mere \$40,000. Today the stakes are much higher: Jane Doe is suing the Petaluma School District for \$1 million.

Doe appears to have a strong case. She complained about the rumor repeatedly to the Kenilworth Junior High guidance counselor, Richard Homrighouse—at one point as

often as five times a month. But Homrighouse did not lift a finger to help her. His attitude, she reports, was that students had free-speech rights to call her what they wanted and that, in any event, the name-calling was bound to stop sooner or later. It didn't, Doe became increasingly depressed, and as a result she transferred to another school. But her reputation was so well known that she was taunted even there. Finally, her parents moved her to a private school.

The monetary amount they are seeking is meant to include Doe's private school tuition and the costs of medical and psychological treatment. The federal district court dismissed Doe's Title IX damages claim because Doe failed to allege that the school engaged in intentional discrimination. But Doe's attorney has amended the complaint and a trial is currently pending.

Another pending case is that of Eve Bruneau, 14, who has filed a suit against the South Kortright Central School District in Delaware County, N.Y., because her teacher and school officials refused to intervene when boys would snap girls' bras, grab their breasts and call them names like "dog-faced bitch." Bruneau's

teacher told her that people would call her names all her life, and that she would have to learn to deal with it. Like Doe, Bruneau dreaded going to her school so much that she was forced to transfer to another one.

Bruneau seeks to demonstrate that her school was guilty of intentional discrimination. "If we show malice," says Bruneau's attorney, Rick Rossein of the City University of New York Law School, "the school will be liable for both compensatory and punitive damages." And if the school is liable, officials will think twice before looking the other way at student-to-student harassment in the future. Her case is set for trial this September.

These lawsuits, then, are important and necessary: They send a strong message to schools that they are obligated to try to halt cruel behavior and develop and enforce sexual harassment policies. The lawsuits also make it clear that verbal harassment can be just as damaging as physical attacks.

But essential as they are, such suits also have some serious shortcomings. For one thing, the charge of sexual harassment implies that the problem is strictly gendered—that boys alone are responsible for harassing girls as "sluts." Yet nothing could be further from the truth. It is girls, not



boys, who tend to be the most vicious name-callers and rumor-mongers. When the "slut" reputation is shoehorned into a legalistic framework, guilty girls get off the hook.

An even deeper problem is that lawsuits may actually promote, rather than inhibit, the targeting of girls as "sluts"—for litigation tends to reinforce the mindset that leads to girls being labeled "sluts" in the first place. Given the way suits are structured, with clear-cut victims and aggressors, it is nearly impossible to fight the "slut" label on the grounds of sexual harassment without strengthening the boundary between "good" girls and "bad" ones.

My own story is instructive. I never considered suing—I didn't even realize I could—but my reaction was typical of those who sue: I escaped into the persona of a celibate "good" girl. I feverishly sought to be known as a smart girl, not a sexual one. True, my bookish identity served me well—I succeeded academically both in high school and college—but it also made me miserable and inhibited. Looking back, I realize that my defense was a tacit endorsement of the system that says sexual girls are to be avoided while sexual boys are to be congratulated with a hearty slap on the back.

When a girl is waging a legal battle against being identified as sexually active, she shouldn't have to defend herself by claiming to be "good." Yet that is what inevitably occurs. The girl harassed as a "slut" can't be an innocent victim, the logic goes, unless she is sexually innocent.

It's precisely this mindset that led Katy Lyle—who sued her Duluth, Minn., high school because she was the object of graphic sexual graffiti and rumors—to present herself as a virginal "good" girl when she appeared on the *Donahue* show several years ago. Phil Donahue even hushed an audience member who inquired about Lyle's sexuality. ("If you weren't dating these guys," the audience member asked, "how did this all come about?") The complaints of a "slut" would never be taken seriously, the show seemed to suggest, if she were sexually active. Similarly, in an ABC "after-school special" broadcast last fall, a character who is based on Lyle was portrayed as totally asexual, her figure hidden beneath a baggy madras shirt. The program, which is used in schools across the country as a training tool, portrayed boys (with the exception of Lyle's brother) as oversexed perverts.

Schools themselves are also perpetuating the idea that "good" girls are abstinent. Last year, Millis High School in Millis, Mass., went so far as to ban hand-holding, hugging and any other physical contact between students on school grounds. The school adopted the rule in response to a lawsuit brought against a football player who had raped or sexually assaulted 11 students. In its zeal to protect female students, administrators seem to have confused sexual harassment with female sexuality. If girls are "good," if they remain asexual, the policy implies, then they won't be harassed.

Small wonder that some former "sluts" themselves pick on others as "sluts." One college student, "Catherine," who settled her high school case out of court, tells me, "There's this 'slut' in the music department who we all pick on, and I'm guilty of it too. She has casual sex with different guys. I

don't know why we don't gossip about the guys."

Is there any hard evidence against the music department "slut"? Come to think of it, she admits, there isn't. "We say things like, 'We saw her with so-and-so.' But nobody knows for sure if anything has happened. We just assume. But if the gossip starts to get graphic, then I get uncomfortable, and I let my discomfort be known. It's gotten me into trouble a few times, because people think I'm really bitchy." It seems that everyone, the school "slut" included, can always find someone less "good" than herself to police.

The lawsuits currently under way are important, but on their own they won't significantly alter the atmosphere that leads to vicious, sexist name-calling. For real progress to occur, teachers and school administrators need to be trained about sexual harassment, but they also need to be taught that teenage girls have just as much a right to be sexual as boys do. Lawyers and others involved in sexual harassment claims need to remember that sexuality is not the same as sexism. Otherwise, one girl in Petaluma may win a million dollars, but at the cost of denying girls' sexuality everywhere. ▽

Leora Tanenbaum writes for *Ms.*, *Mirabella* and other publications. She regularly writes on gender issues for *In These Times*. Leora Tanenbaum is collecting stories from women who were targeted as "sluts" when they were in junior high or high school. If you would like to be interviewed, please write to her at PO Box 672, New York, NY 10023, and include your address and phone number. Anonymity is guaranteed for those who desire it.

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**B L A C K A M E R I C A**

# Back to Afrocentrism

**M**any participants at the 19th annual Black Studies Conference at Olive-Harvey College here were feverishly engaged in private conversations about a renewed assault on the ideas of Afrocentricity, although none of the official panels actually addressed the issue.

*A recent attack on Afrocentric scholarship provokes new debate—and unexpected support on the left.*

By Salim Muwakkil  
CHICAGO

Of particular concern to many participants was the warm critical reception accorded Mary Lefkowitz's new book, *Not Out of Africa*. Lefkowitz, a professor of Greek and Roman Classics at Wellesley College, has sparked heated controversy with a book that attempts to debunk what she asserts are some of Afrocentrism's major premises. The problem, of course, is that Afrocentrism is too diffuse an idea to have many major premises.

The term "Afrocentrism," in its current usage, is the invention of Molefi Asante, chair of the department of African-American studies at Temple University. His 1980 book *Afrocentricity* could probably serve as the manifesto of the movement. In a recent inter-

view, Asante boiled the message down to this: "It's a very simple idea. African people for 500 years have lived on the intellectual terms of Europeans. The African perspective has finally come to dinner. Afrocentricity is an orientation to data, which says that African people are ancient, and should be seen as agents, as subjects in history instead of as marginal players on the fringes of Europe."

But the question of what Afrocentrism works out to in practice has many answers. Some call for the insertion of Afrocentric epistemology and pedagogy into academia, others seek to establish Afrocentric curricula in elementary and secondary schools. There are aficionados of Afrocentric fashion, Afrocentric spirituality, Afrocentric cuisine; the list goes on. In popular parlance, the movement often gets treated as chiefly a cultural phenomenon, a matter of self-esteem and black pride.

The wide rubric of the movement has allowed for many misinterpretations. Lefkowitz chose to focus on the strictly academic variety of Afrocentrism, particularly the work of Martin Bernal and others who have challenged the standard accounts in classical scholarship of the Greek origins of Western civilization. Lefkowitz finds no evidence to support some Afrocentrists' claims that Socrates and Cleopatra were black. She debunks the widely held Afrocentric notion that Aristotle stole his ideas from the library of ancient Alexandria in Egypt. The library, she notes, was established after Aristotle's death. Lefkowitz also attacks the idea that there was an ancient Egyptian mystery system, including great libraries and universities. More generally, Lefkowitz calls into question the broadly circulated view that Greek civilization derives in large part from an Egyptian civilization that was primarily African in character. *Not Out of Africa* thus answers a call to all Europhiles to come to the aid of their hegemony in a world besieged by the multicultural hordes. The subtitle of her book nicely sums up its alarmist tone: *How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*.

It's not mainstream opposition to Afrocentrism that has caused such a buzz at the conference. After all, Lefkowitz's arguments are nothing new, long circulated among Europhile conservatives. In fact, many of her targets are "straw men" positions, discredited by all but the most extreme Afrocentrists. What's more, according to Asante, she is elaborating on a misconception.

"One of the biggest myths about Afrocentricity is that it's about trying to raise the self-esteem of black people by trying to create a romantic idea of history," Asante says. "Another is that it's about specific facts. It's not about specific facts, but about orientation to facts. Cleopatra's color is not the issue with us," he says. "In fact, she was probably Greek. But the issue with us is, was she important? The answer is no."

What is troubling about Lefkowitz, however, is that many

in progressive circles hail her as a kindred spirit who somehow is free of PC cant and devoted to pure scholarship. In an admiring profile in the April 16 *Village Voice*, Tom Carson assures us that “even though the book is sure to be taken up by conservatives as an ideological manual, Lefkowitz is no multicult basher.” Carson later asserts that Lefkowitz is “clearly sensitive and decent as well as learned, and there’s little question that she’s much less troubled by the specific content of Afrocentrist claims than by indifference to scholarly scrupulousness about evidence and probability.”

But Martin Bernal, author of the two-volume study, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*—and one of the principal targets in Lefkowitz’s polemic—emphatically places Lefkowitz among the highest-ranking figures in the conservative counterattack on all things multicultural. Bernal’s book, which has been hailed by many Afrocentrists as a supporting text, contends that Greek (and thus Western) civilization owes much to Egyptian and other Afroasiatic civilizations.

Bernal, who is white, argues in *Black Athena* that Egypt was widely accepted as a precursor to Greek civilization until the mid-19th century, when a new “Aryan Model” arose to accommodate the new “racial science” that held Africans and Asians to be inherently inferior to Europeans. The Aryan model discounted all contributions of Egypt, and argued that Greek civilization emerged from a conquest from the north by the Aryan or Indo-European-speaking Hellenes.

Bernal sees Lefkowitz as a scholar with a broad political ax to grind. “Her sense of belonging to a small band of defenders of reason against the forces of unreason, or the demon ‘political correctness,’ antedates her encounter with Afrocentrism,” Bernal commented on a posting on the Internet. “Before 1991, she was the scourge of what she saw as feminist nonsense in classics. In both struggles, she has found powerful helpers on the far right.” Bernal points to her connection to the Bradley and Olin Foundations, which generously fund many right-wing groups, including the Heritage Foundation and the National Association of Scholars (NAS).

“Mary Lefkowitz, along with Jeane Kirkpatrick, Peter Diamondopoulos and some three dozen others, sits on the advisory board of the NAS and plays an active role in its journal *Academic Questions*,” Bernal went on to note. The lavish foundation support for these figures underscores another key point, in Bernal’s view: Lefkowitz is no embattled scholar fighting a lonely struggle for the integrity of untainted research. Unlike the Afrocentrists they attack—or even white liberals—Lefkowitz’s conservative comrades are amply funded and regularly published.

Politics aside, Lefkowitz’s book offers little that is empirically arresting. Lefkowitz only succeeds in presenting a “competitive plausibility” to Bernal’s main contention that Greece “borrowed” much from Egypt. Yet she argues that what she presents are “warranted facts.”

To be sure, there are excesses in the Afrocentric movement that need to be criticized. The racial essentialists within the movement, like Leonard Jeffries, for example,

who argue that melanin and other biological distinctions provide black people with certain advantages, have been aggressively challenged by forces within the movement and are in eclipse. Other excesses are still current—such as Francis Cress Welsing’s theory of whiteness as a genetic mutation. But excesses perhaps should be expected of an emergent movement unsure in its sympathies and alliances. Yet the line of attack chosen by Lefkowitz and her conservative cohorts is just as intolerant as the most extreme Afrocentric position.

Lefkowitz reiterates Arthur J. Schlesinger Jr.’s charge that Afrocentric history is purely a “feel-good” attempt to promote group self-esteem among blacks. Instead, these historians argue that history should consist of “dispassionate analysis, judgment and perspective.” However, Bernal argues, “this is far from the way history is taught in schools, where the nation or locality is always emphasized and placed above that of others. Thus, for African-American children to be taught about Africa and diasporic triumphs is not unusual and is particularly useful given the constant psychological battering they receive in a racist society.”

On the other hand, Bernal says he agrees with Schlesinger and Lefkowitz that historical researchers should attempt to transcend their own environments and achieve objectivity as far as possible. However, he adds, “the Aryan Model, with its denial of ancient tradition and its insistence on a purely white, purely European Greece, is an extreme example of ‘feel-good’ scholarship and education for whites.”



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# I N T H E A R T S

## Plain Jane

“W

*A new film version of Jane Eyre robs one of literature's great heroines of her voice.*

By Linda DeLibero

hy do you like Miss Austen so very much?” a vexed Charlotte Brontë once queried the Victorian man of letters George Henry Lewes. Brontë, a writer clearly more disposed toward sensibility than sense, had no patience for Jane Austen’s delicate art. Although both novelists posed the same question—how does a woman survive in a culture of strained opportunity?—Brontë’s passionate heroines answered by hurling themselves against the bonds of convention, while Austen’s gentle creatures conquer by treading carefully within them. As unfathomable as such tip-toeing was to Brontë, she would be doubly perplexed to find late 20th-century filmgoers in thrall to it.

After all, Brontë’s portrayal of female passion is uncannily attuned to our own age, while Austen’s

decorous young women would seem to offer little to viewers accustomed to Sharon Stone and Demi Moore. But the recent success of the Austen screen adaptations—particularly Ang Lee’s *Sense and Sensibility*—demonstrated the marketability of 19th-century literary heroines, and of that much-maligned genre, the women’s film. What better time to introduce a new generation of filmgoers to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*? If the demure Dashwood sisters could capture an audience, surely the tempestuous Jane would triumph. The writers are again in a position to be compared, much as they were in Brontë’s lifetime.

But with Franco Zeffirelli’s version of Brontë’s classic—the fourth to reach the screen—a curious reversal takes place. While Ang Lee and Emma Thompson (who adapted *Sense and Sensibility* for the screen) managed to capture the well of feeling that lurks beneath Austen’s pretty surfaces, Zeffirelli’s *Jane Eyre* is pretty bloodless. It’s as if Zeffirelli were afraid someone might accuse him of making a melodrama if he let loose with Brontë’s material. Of course,

*Jane Eyre* is melodrama, which is partly why it has been more popular with readers than anything Austen ever wrote—the story of the plain and penniless governess who wins the love of her imperious employer is the model for a thousand gothic romances and numerous Hollywood films. Zeffirelli, in his determination to shake off those past associations, has eliminated much of the novel’s tension, and a great deal of its fun.

This is a shame, because this *Jane Eyre* has much to recommend it—chiefly, with one glaring exception, its cast. Anna Paquin is perfect as the willing young Jane, and the scenes of her tormented life in a ghastly orphanage are among the best in the film. A host of British theater luminaries—Joan Plowright, Billie Whitelaw, Fiona Shaw—inhabit the characters precisely as a devoted reader of the novel would remember them. And in Charlotte Gainsbourg, Zeffirelli presents a heroine who is finally worthy of the “quakerish” governess Brontë envisioned. Where previous actresses (Joan Fontaine, Susannah York) made concessions to the character’s homeliness by simply going without makeup, Gainsbourg manages to convince us that she is genuinely plain. Her neck juts forward in a manner that recalls a famous description of Brontë herself, whose head was apparently too large for her tiny body. Gainsbourg carries herself awkwardly; her protruding jaw suggests both grim determination and vulnerability.

In short, Gainsbourg is an oddly appealing actress; too bad that it’s impossible to tell from this role whether she’s a good one. For Zeffirelli has taken what surely must rank as one of the strongest female voices in all of literature and given her very little to say. Worse, he’s rendered the titanic



PHOTO BY CLIVE COOTE



### Jane Eyre

Directed by  
Franco Zeffirelli

romantic struggle at the book's core as a game of no contest. Jane and Rochester's love story is meant to be a monumental battle of wills: Brooding and unapproachable at first, Rochester warms to Jane because of her uncompromising goodness and honesty; but by the time she's won him, she's nearly lost her soul. Melodramatic, yes. But what could be more modern than the story of a woman who finally refuses love on anything but her own terms?

This transformation from cold indifference to near obsession is entirely missing from the film, in large part because William Hurt plays Rochester as a slightly cracked but kindly neurotic—he's just trying to get in touch with his feelings. Hurt stares into space a lot; he drags out his lines and occasionally accents the wrong sentence. That's about as scary as he gets. And because he's such a nice guy, there's really no challenge or threat implicit in Jane's loving him. All it takes to reveal the utter inadequacy of Hurt's performance is a look at what Orson Welles did with the role in the 1944 version of *Jane Eyre*. Welles' interpretation makes it clear why Brontë's Jane nearly makes an idol of Rochester; he's

the Byronic man incarnate.

It also helped that Welles—along with Aldous Huxley—wrote the screenplay for the film, retaining large chunks of Brontë in the original dialogue. In Welles' scenes with Joan Fontaine especially, those dazzling exchanges manage to catch every subtlety of feeling between the principals. But such elevated prose would be out of place in Zeffirelli's version because his screenwriter, Hugh Whitmore, decided to strip the poetry from Brontë's art. The dialogue is "often" his, Whitmore says, "not because I think mine is better, but because Brontë's speeches are quite literary, and there are words that might not be recognized by audiences today." Hmm... like what words? At one point, Hurt's Rochester asks Jane if she'll turn sick at the sight of blood. In the book, Jane replies, "I think I shall not; I have never been tried yet." Gainsbourg's Jane simply answers, "I don't know," apparently because we can't be expected to understand that "tried" is a synonym for "tested."

It's a minor moment, and if you had never read Brontë, or seen the Welles film, you'd never notice all the little ways that Brontë's characters have been reduced by the colorless language they utter. You'd merely wonder at all the fuss over this Jane Eyre creature, who was considered a rather shocking proponent of female emancipation back in the old days, but who here barely speaks—or sees. When a filmmaker robs a character of her voice, he might be expected to make up for it visually with, say, some fairly creative point-of-view shots. But Zeffirelli forgoes this means of expression as well. There is little in *Jane Eyre* to convey the singular, extraordinary vision of its heroine, and therefore little to suggest what she has to offer contemporary viewers.

And she has much to offer. A filmmaker sensitive to the meaning of Jane Eyre's struggle—to remain fully human in the throes of overwhelming feeling—might have turned the material into something more relevant to female viewers than anything Hollywood currently offers. Ang Lee and Emma Thompson—apparently unconcerned with whether viewers were smart enough to "get it"—did this, for the most part, with *Sense and Sensibility*. The film's landscape may have been considerably prettier than Austen's dull countryside; its happy ending considerably less bittersweet than the novel's. But Lee and Thompson's characters, despite their finery, tramp through the mud to gain their reward. Those glorious expanses are peopled with vipers and idiots. The Dashwood sisters speak the "literary language" of their creator, and audiences understand them, just as they understand the film's visual shorthand for Austen's cultured but cruel society.

The lesson of Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre*, then? Trust the artist who trusts his material, as well as his audience. Somewhere, poor Charlotte Brontë is still asking, "Why do you like Miss Austen so very much?"

# I N P R I N T

## Dream on

By David Chappell

Eleven years ago, Jennifer Hochschild made a reputation for herself as a profound thinker and diligent researcher by publishing *The New American Dilemma*, one of the most disturbing post-mortems on the civil rights movement ever written. The book presented a detailed analysis of how several cities desegregated their schools. Hochschild sifted through thousands of facts to find hitherto unnoticed patterns in this experience, which would have been enough for most political scientists. But Hochschild sifted as a philosopher, not simply as a scientist. She examined every fact and every emerging pattern from a broader theoretical and historical perspective than most analysts of race and contemporary politics bother to acquire. She arrived at disturbing new insights not only about discrimination and the customary remedies for it, but also about the broader liberal assumptions that lie behind both the discrimination and the remedies.

In *The New American Dilemma* Hochschild came, among other things, to the arresting conclusion that desegregation plans failed when they were politely, cautiously and tentatively introduced, with due deference to the feelings of the white parents involved. In other words, the plans provoked successful resistance when they were tokenistic or incremental "pilot" programs, for in those cases the resisters saw indecisiveness in the authority that ordered the plan, possible escape routes in the surrounding communities that were not part of the pilot program and a reservoir of useful public sympathy in the fact that their school or neighborhood had been, in effect, singled out. Conversely, desegregation plans succeeded when they were shoved down everybody's throat at once—when the potential resisters saw an uncompromising commitment behind the desegregation order, no escape routes and no singling out.

The more general formula was that liberalism only advances by illiberal methods, or to put it another way, that

liberals were right to feel uncomfortable—if they were perceptive and honest enough to feel uncomfortable—with the way their goals were achieved. Many readers, even those who proudly claimed to have outgrown liberalism or to have resisted its appeal all along, were disturbed by these findings, and she gave them no easy way out.

The most disturbing thing about Hochschild's new book, *Facing Up to the American Dream*—her first since *The New American Dilemma*—is to see her apply her considerable talents and energies to something as superficial as opinion polls. Her book's subtitle refers to the deepest reaches of America's subconscious, but her main sources have names like Gallup, Harris, New York Times/CBS News and ABC/Washington Post. These institutions gather "data" that lie so loosely on the surface of consciousness that they can be swept up without so much effort as a thoughtful question, so loosely that they don't remain in consciousness (if they touch it at all) for long: They are organized into artificial "news," and then with the rest of the news used for wrapping fish and lining birdcages.

But Hochschild finds much more in the polls than the pollsters—and those who scoff at them—can see. *Facing Up* is not just about the American Dream, which Hochschild defines rather precisely as equal opportunity for social success, but about how "race" has thwarted the Dream. And race, though it has grown into a national fetish, a human tragedy, a central theme in modern history, is originally and ultimately the most—literally—superficial of subjects, the color of skin. Yet by wrapping around everything else, race, like opinion polls, takes the shape of much that it envelops; that may be the tragedy. As the principal thing that obscures the path by which the American Dream might come true, or at least excuses our failure to find such a path, race may be understandable only through attention to its superficiality. If we approach it with anything more penetrating than an opinion poll, we miss it.

At any rate, Hochschild manages to marshal the polling data she has gathered into an analysis that is tragic, and deeply revealing. Hochschild summarizes what she learns about race and the American Dream with three "paradoxes." Neither of the first two—"Succeeding More and Enjoying It Less" and "What's All the Fuss About?"—will be very surprising to readers of *In These Times*.

"Succeeding More and Enjoying It Less" summarizes the opinion data taken from the black middle class, that small but significant number who have "made it." Far more than white people of their own class, and far more than lower-class people of their own race, successful black people express disappointment and anger at the general state of race relations today, and at the status and prospects of both themselves and black people in

**Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation**

By Jennifer L. Hochschild  
Princeton University Press  
412 pp., \$29.95

general. Since such voices are prominent in the media and academia, perhaps the only surprise in this paradox is to have these voices identified as distinctly middle-class. Hochschild treats them as a cohort of unusually successful African-Americans rather than as representative of black people as a whole, as they are so often classified by the simplistic (and racist) categories that shape academic and journalistic life. It may also be surprising that disillusionment among successful black people is growing in measurable ways while the measurable indices of discrimination and prejudice are mostly shrinking.

"What's All the Fuss About?" summarizes the opinion data taken from white people generally, high numbers of whom think that racism and discrimination are on the wane and that black people in general are doing better than ever. An important segment even thinks that black people have an advantage: Though only 7 percent of white people say they have ever lost an opportunity because of affirmative action, a much larger proportion claim a friend or relative has lost out (16 percent), and an even larger proportion say they have "seen" someone lose out at work (21 percent). White people with such opinions are as prominent in the media as disillusioned black professionals—most notably, the politicians who traffic in white resentment and the "angry white males" who vote for them (actually, females are just as likely to express these views). White people with these views are even popping up now in academia, where affirmative action once had greatest support (though it helped well-to-do white women far more than black people). The only surprise here may be that, while white people have become more optimistic since the '60s about black people's prospects for success, they have become less optimistic about their own prospects (with good reason, as the rising proportion of white people among welfare recipients suggests). The slipping fortunes of white Americans seem to have something to do with their exaggeration and resentment of black success.

But Hochschild's third and most original paradox,

"Remaining Under the Spell of the Great National Suggestion," is more completely surprising—so surprising that it is hard to know whether to be depressed or hopeful about it. This paradox summarizes the opinion data taken from poor black people. Far more than successful black people, and far more than either rich or poor white people, poor black people still express strong faith in the American Dream and their capacity to realize it. One result of this faith—and of the disproportionate number of poor people in the black population—is that "more blacks than whites (89 to 70 percent) deem it crucial for public schools to teach 'the common heritage and values that we share as Americans.'"

Hochschild uses the word "heartbreaking" to describe

this faith, and this is a judicious word choice (as usual with her). Most poor black people accept the American Dream down to its most austere tenet, that success is a mark of virtue. That makes them look down on other poor black people: "Those just above the poverty line condemn welfare recipients; welfare recipients condemn long-term recipients; long-term recipients condemn those who have abandoned their children and thus cannot claim AFDC, and so on." Poor black people share many of the views of "angry white males": "Up to

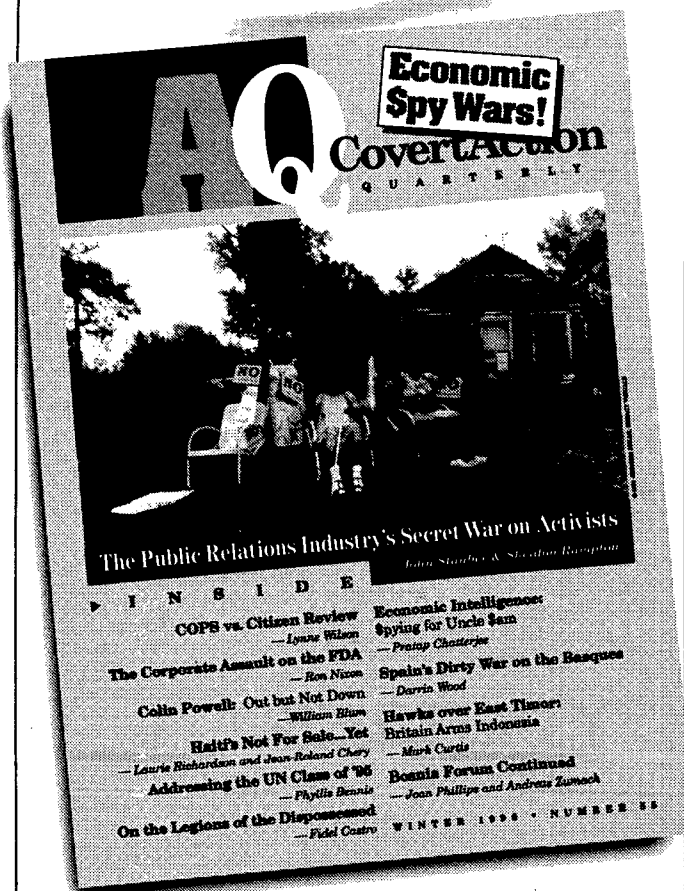


two-thirds of poor African-Americans agree that 'most people on welfare could take care of themselves if they really wanted to,' that 'poor young women often have babies so they can collect welfare' or that 'welfare benefits make poor people dependent and encourage them to stay poor.' " Perhaps it is a good thing for the welfare state that poor black people don't vote much.

As Hochschild explores the variations on this third "paradox," the word "heartbreaking" begins to sound understated. She moves away from the majority of poor black people who express a straightforward faith in the Dream to the small minority who redefine the Dream (as a fantasy to escape the psychological pain of past failure, or as a motive for upward mobility through crime). She also examines the very small minority who reject the Dream and



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become self-destructive or too nihilistic to take the rare opportunity that comes their way. The reason that so few poor black people turn to crime may be that the stakes of not believing in the Dream are so much higher for them than for anybody else.

With a lot more detail, and much "anecdotal" corroboration of the polls from newspaper accounts and a wide range of literary sources, Hochschild explores these "paradoxes." She adds a remarkably searching and original comparison of the experience of "white" immigrants and black people with the American Dream. Her most important conclusion (stated far more cautiously than it is paraphrased here) seems to be that we (rich and poor, black and white) are stuck with the American Dream whether we like it or not. Those who "should" reject it are least likely to. Though the Dream often functions as an ideology to keep the poor from recognizing the injustices they suffer, it also can be the basis for powerful demands to eliminate injustice. To make it serve this latter purpose (as it has once in a while in the past) will require determined effort and probably a lot of luck, and it will particularly require attention to the way that class interferes with the realization of the Dream as much as (if not more than) race does.

*Facing Up to the American Dream* makes it clear that the surface over which opinion polls skate is quite complex. One of the most important uses Hochschild's book will have is as a corrective to the smug, research-free meditations on "race" by such authors as Shelby Steele and Derrick Bell. These two authors are superficially different—Steele, as the best-selling author from the camp of racial Pollyannas, insists that America doesn't need to worry about race anymore, and Bell, as the best-selling author from the camp of racial Chicken Littles, insists that worry is justified yet useless, since America is by definition pathologically and irretrievably racist. But they are quite similar in their approach to race: They never go out and ask anybody else's opinion, let alone try to take a sample that might suggest something general about other people. Steele sees people in the shopping mall, and *knows* what they think. Bell, perhaps because he is so secure in his position as a racial authority, does not make even that much of a pretense of attribution. Their reviewers apparently assume (in their respective ideological corners) that because the author is a black man, his thoughts must reveal something important about black people. Both are praised for their insight, and are offered academic chairs at the top institutions in the land and publishing contracts by the most prestigious publishers.

When Hochschild discovers complexity after complexity in what were, in isolation, superficial glances at mass opinion, what she does—though she is too polite to say, or perhaps even to think this—is expose the superficiality of the famous thinkers who are taken as profound authorities on race.

David Chappell's book *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Johns Hopkins, 1994) received a Gustavus Myers award last year.

# Peace when?

By Jay Murphy

For a pair of groups that operate without any discernible political strategy or strong popular support, Hamas and Islamic Jihad perhaps still have reason to gloat. Their bombings of February 25 and March 3 and 4, which killed 62 Israelis, succeeded in their goal of halting, if not mortally wounding, an already precarious and profoundly troubled "peace process." Palestinians now find themselves in a state of siege much harsher than any enforced before. The Israeli closure of the Palestinian territories has imposed crippling daily losses on the battered Palestinian economy; general economic activity in the Palestinian territories has fallen off by 60 percent since the closure; and in a new twist of fate, Palestinian security police act in tandem with the Israeli Defense Force, storming universities and arresting students. Medical clinics have closed across the Occupied Territories due not only to the restriction of movement but also to the lack of medicines, even though such distribution was never banned even during the height of the Gulf War or during the intifada.

"This is the worst siege we have been in," says Palestinian spokeswoman and newly elected Legislative Council member Hanan Ashrawi. "This is total isolation." Nor does Ashrawi see any hope of diplomatic relief: "There are no talks, there is no peace process. They have been unilaterally suspended and violated by Israel, which acts as if it is a unilateral process, that there is no partner."

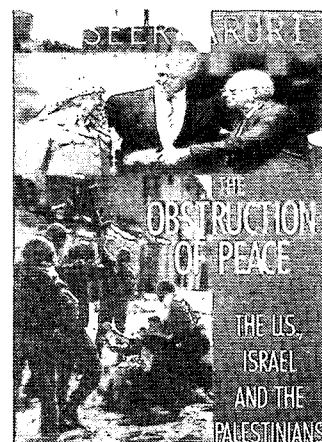
The question of whether Israel will continue to accept the flow of cheap Palestinian labor into the country, which brings an estimated \$2.5 million a day into the territories, pales in significance next to the larger problem of how to jump-start Palestinian economic life. "What little industry we have is collapsing," Ashrawi says. An outspoken critic of the Oslo peace agreements, "flabbergasted" at the Palestinian concessions that went into them, Ashrawi now sees "the chickens coming home to roost." Yet according to Ashrawi,

the current impasse stems not so much from the flaws of Oslo I and Oslo II as from the Israeli refusal to comply with "the most minuscule things" specified in the agreements. Among the lapses are the Israelis' failure to release Palestinian political prisoners, to guarantee basic human rights and to allow safe passage and freedom of movement among Palestinian areas. Meanwhile, the building and expansion of settlements proceeds apace, including a new one sanctioned by the Labor government in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has not improved conditions under Arafat's rule. The PNA maintains a 20,000-member police force in Gaza alone, making for a 50-to-1 citizen-to-police ratio, the highest in the world. PNA officers have moved to censor publications critical of the Oslo accords, while detaining citizens indiscriminately in their searches for suspects in the Hamas bombings. Palestinians in Gaza who have lived longest under PNA rule have seen health and sanitary conditions worsen. Sara Roy, who has studied Israeli strategies of "de-development" in the Occupied Territories, estimates that 33 percent of the Palestinian poor in Gaza became so *after* the Oslo accords. Many Gazans sought to use the forum of the Palestinian elections in January to challenge the corruption and overweening bureaucracy of the PNA. Some popular resentment of the PNA was already surfacing in the West Bank just prior to the January vote—graffiti in Nablus read "No to the Gazan occupation!"

So far, the many critics of the "peace process" have been ostracized from the mainstream U.S. press. American coverage of Palestinian opinion simplistically pits the terrorist opposition (Hamas) against the peace camp, to the exclusion of any other view. One of the only positive developments of the current crisis may be that it will force the press to give Oslo critics their long-overdue hearing, now that the process has run aground in a manner many of them foresaw quite clearly.

*Peace and Its Discontents* is a collection of a number of crisp, incisive, eloquent editorials against Oslo I and Oslo II by the



**The Obstruction of Peace: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians**  
By Naseer H. Aruri  
Common Courage Press  
370 pp., \$18.95

**Peace and Its Discontents**  
By Edward W. Said  
Vintage Books  
188 pp., \$12

**Intimate Enemies: Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land**  
By Meron Benvenisti  
University of California Press  
260 pp., \$24.95

most prominent defender of Palestinian rights in the United States. *Peace and Its Discontents*, as Edward Said says in his introduction, is "the first of my books to have been written from start to finish with an Arab audience in mind." Of the 21 essays and single interview collected here, only four were previously published in American journals. Said's writings for *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Ahram* are unfailingly focused, direct and anti-imperialist. Despite this especially horrid period for Palestinians, Said can summon a bracing, unexpected optimism. Recent changes in the region's balance of power present a unique opportunity for the Arab world to develop its own mind, Said argues: "It will certainly never develop at all if we are still dependent on the Great White Father. ... [T]he point is that he has come to the end of his reign." Said spices his searing commentary on the "peace process" with telling personal vignettes, such as his 1992 visit with Yasser Arafat as the PLO chairman recuperated from a plane crash in the Libyan desert. Watching TV coverage of the 1992 Israeli elections, Said realized that Arafat had so little in the way of a long-term political strategy that "he was staking his entire future on Rabin's electoral win." This reliance on "wagering on the other" is what led the Palestinians to their present state of "defeat of the will," Said contends.

Fiercely, and with some exasperation, trying to fight a historical record that is "breathtaking in its dishonesty," Said is nothing if not acerbic about Yitzhak Rabin, consecrated in death by the Western media as a "man of peace" but reviled by Said as an "aging hawk" guilty of "ethnic cleansing." Nor is Said any easier on Arafat: "Poorly educated, megalomaniac, and now living in the terminal dream world of all petty dictators, he cannot and never will be reformed." On the other hand, his warm tributes to figures like Hanna Mikhail (the enigmatic Abu Omar who had been vividly described in Jean Genet's posthumously published, poetic meditation on his time among the Palestinians, *Prisoners of Love*) infuse the book with a vibrancy and immediacy that goes a long way toward establishing the "authentic intellectual idiom" Said calls for in the region's cultural and political discourse.

Many books have exhumed the murky diplomatic history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (among the most recent is Norman Finkelstein's *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*). But Naseer Aruri's *The Obstruction of Peace* pays especially close attention to the United States' historic

interests and policy goals in the region. Aruri's narrative moves soberly, systematically and inexorably in explicating how the Oslo I and II accords finally fulfill the United States' long-coveted goal of being the Middle East's unilateral superpower, in league with its Israeli ally. As Aruri notes, the realization of this ambition undercuts nearly a half-century of U.N. resolutions and international law, creating a situation in which "U.S. policy becomes, in effect, a substitute for international law."



Aruri points out that the Gulf War also proved decisive in turning many Arab countries away from their own adherence to the U.N. and the use of "international consensus" to pressure Israel into withdrawing from the territories. This approach had been affirmed in a long string of Arab summits in Rabat (1974), Fez (1982), Amman (1987) and Algiers (1988). Aruri points out that following the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia even fielded a proposal for a Palestinian state in Jordan, much like that advanced in Reagan's 1982 plan.

In Aruri's view, the region's most dangerous development is the creeping legalization of the military occupation. Israel has never officially owned up to the occupation as such; now legal niceties and diplomatic euphemisms are giving this fiction the force of law. The Clinton administration recently shifted from the use of the descriptive term "occupied" to the more discreet "disputed" in referring to Gaza and the West Bank. (An earlier Israeli euphemism was "controlled.") Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., spelled out the logic of this shift in 1993. "We simply do not accept the description of territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war as 'occupied Palestinian territory,'" she announced, going on to note that "this language could be taken to indicate sovereignty—a matter which both Israel and the PLO have agreed must be decided in negotiations on the final status of the territories." In other words, the concessions Israel manages to wring out of the enfeebled PLO are the final word on the territories' status—not U.N. Resolutions 242 or 338, which upheld the national rights of Palestinians. Nor will the U.S.-brokered new order in the Middle East bother with the host of other U.N. rulings finding that the territories were conquered by force and mandating that Israel abide by the human rights conventions governing the treatment of a population under military occupation. Israel is obliged under any number of U.N. resolutions to leave the territo-



ries; the new agreements enact no such provisions—the Israelis will leave only if they want to. For the first time in history, the Clinton administration has endorsed the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem, which has been widely condemned by most nations (including the United States), while advancing the view—beyond the pale even for the Reagan and Bush administrations—that settlement activity in the territories is not illegal.

While Arafat fatuously speaks of the Palestinians' "friend in the White House," Aruri knows that Bill Clinton is more like what *Yediot Aharonot* columnist Nahum Bernea ironically dubbed him—"the last Zionist." In addition to further legitimizing the terms of the occupation, Clinton has moved Zionist policy wonks like Martin Indyk and Samuel Lewis into major foreign policy positions for the first time: Indyk as U.S. ambassador to Israel; Lewis as director of policy planning in the State Department. Aruri also acutely analyzes U.S. domestic politics in this "Pax Americana, Pax Israelia" age, noting how members of Congress, right-wing U.S. Jewish organizations and Israel's Likud party join forces to produce policy measures to the right of the Israeli government itself.

Aruri, like Said, seems to underestimate the popularity of Arafat in the "autonomous zones" (polled at 58 percent after Oslo II), as well as Palestinian support for the peace accords themselves. Many, if not most, Palestinian citizens perceive the accords as a poor bargain but the only way to move ahead. Yet his most damning criticism—that the agreements make Arafat and the PNA an "enforcer" that answers more to the United States and Israel than to their own people—now has come all too vividly and painfully to pass.

Meron Benvenisti is that rarest of figures in the Middle East: a convinced Zionist Israeli who also grasps the true proportions of the Palestinians' rather miserable predicament. A former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Benvenisti administered the West Bank Data project, a rich source of information that won the respect of an unlikely range of critics, from resident *New York Times* orientalist Thomas Friedman to Fouad Ajami, the most frequently quoted Arab in the American press, to the incorrigible human rights activist Israel Shahak. Benvenisti objects to a solution of "national ghettos" that divides the land and tries to hold out for an "intercommunal" solution to intercommunal hatred and strife within a "common geopolitical framework." In explaining the September 1993 agreements, Benvenisti stresses the "post-ideological" nature of the new Israel, which has developed the impatience with political conflict typical of many Western consumer societies. And in contrast to critics like Said and Aruri, who imply the Palestinians gained nothing from the accords, Benvenisti emphasizes that most Israelis took the recognition of the PLO as a seismic shock, posing as it did the at-least implicit acknowledgment of another people with some claim to the same land. Benvenisti outlines his own personal struggles of head and heart in regard to this seemingly interminable conflict, describes his own shock at "the historic handshake" on the White House

lawn and yet offers a brutal summation of the original peace agreement: "I admit that it did not occur to me that the Palestinians could reach such a state of weakness and go through a period of such desperation that they would recognize defeat and allow those who had brought catastrophe upon them to dictate the conditions of their surrender."

Benvenisti, who begins his book with an account of the October 8, 1990 massacre on the Temple Mount, deftly shows how political or ethnic conflicts become all-embracing religious ones. He is particularly good on the history and applicability of "population transfer" to the conflict, as well as skewering what he sees as the hypocrisy of the Peace Now brand of the Israeli left. During the Gulf War, Benvenisti thought the "Israeli left was a bit unmannerly, indecorously overeager, in the speed with which it divorced the Palestinians," exhibiting "more than a little bit of condescension and a sense of relief." In Benvenisti's view, the left used the crisis to return to the fold of the "national consensus," giving up the illusion that the intifada would end the occupation and that "they need not lift a finger." When Israel used the Gulf War as a cover for extremely harsh measures in the territories, scarcely a dissident voice was heard. His warnings that a "peace" based on such fundamental inequality cannot survive seems especially apt given the events of the past two months.

"Extremists exist due to lack of justice here," reflected Palestinian liberation theologian Naim Ateek back in January in his office in St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. "They are not extremists for extremism's sake." Ateek's practical linkage of Israel's security with a just political solution that is perceived as such by the Palestinian people may seem a reasonable enough stance in a region awash with irrationality, although it has failed to reach the White House or the editorial board of the *New York Times*. The refrain in the U.S. media runs "the ball is in Arafat's court," but it may actually be that the "ball" is in the court of the Palestinians, if only because, as with so many tragedies in the past, the world and the Arab countries have left them bereft, and only able to rely on themselves. ◀

Jay Murphy is editor of the anthology *For Palestine* (1993) and is a journalist and critic living in New York City.

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# SEIU

*Continued from page 22*

expose themselves to opponents who will accuse them of not looking after the grievances of dues-paying members? Staff members who service contracts may hate the hard work, irregular hours and different style of work in organizing, just as organizers often see workers' complaints over matters such as getting more overtime as petty diversions from the union's grander cause.

In the most successful locals, staffers organize workers to represent and bargain for themselves while training them to recruit new members, thus bridging the potential division between "servicing" and organizing. Mike Garcia, president of Local 1877 in San Jose, Calif., has his staff function as organizers of workplace fights with employers, leaving routine grievances to a "contract enforcement center." In a preliminary study of SEIU locals that are trying to change, Bill Fletcher, SEIU public service division director, and Richard Hurd of Cornell University conclude that the condition for success is having a local leader who can build a consensus for this organizing strategy. But Fletcher and Hurd also caution that focusing solely on the union's self-interest in creating greater market power may be inadequate. If Stern's team hopes to bring about a profound transformation of the union, it will have to go beyond even its ambitious goal for a "culture of participation" to creating a new social and political vision for labor.

This is where SEIU's new political strategy comes in. The union will focus much more on mobilizing members on specific issue campaigns and less on candidates. It will demand more of candidates it backs. "Having a 'D' after your name won't get you a pass anymore," explained new Executive Vice President Eliseo Medina, a former farmworker organizer. "It's not about party labels but the interests of our members."

Medina and Josie Mooney, a San Francisco SEIU leader who is president of that city's central labor council, have both begun implementing a "Labor Neighbor" strategy. In each case, union members act much like precinct captains to educate union members in their neighborhood on elections and issues and get members to the polls. Mooney's operation provided Willie Brown with his margin of victory in San Francisco's mayoral race last year. Politicians are taking note of such successes and recognizing the potential votes that labor can now mobilize on its own. "Our political power has quadrupled," Mooney says. "People don't run for office without talking to us first."

Stern is mainly interested in creating choices, both within the Democratic Party and outside it, so that the union will not be so dependent on the Democratic Party and its candidates. For example, SEIU voted to send a delegation to the June convention of Labor Party Advocates, a movement initiated by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union to create a non-electoral party advocating worker-oriented programs. More significantly, Stern wants to put more money and effort into local, often non-

partisan, races to recruit union members as candidates, and to train and mobilize 10,000 "member political organizers" over the next four years to form the core of an extensive grass-roots political organization. By focusing on its own issues, such as "living wage" ordinances, universal health care, stronger patient care standards and corporate responsibility, SEIU hopes it can set an agenda of questions that candidates must address.

SEIU may have already emerged from the shadows and taken a leading role among the small number of unions trying to find a path out of the past two decades of despair and decline, but its new leaders are likely to raise expectations quickly. "It will be an even more activist union than in the past," Medina insists with a sense of buoyant optimism. "It will be more effective—moving in the same direction but more and stronger, more membership involvement, more political action. We're about building power, power for workers, power over the decisions that affect our members day to day, for good or ill."

## Letters

*Continued from page 5*

as long as they are in the region to provide security for the pipeline. As a result, the local people Unocal is supposedly helping will continue to suffer, thanks to their investment project.

(EarthRights International has a permanent presence on the Thai/Burmese border, monitoring human rights abuses and environmental degradation. ERI receives firsthand information from local people in the pipeline region.)

**Tyler R. Giannini**

Co-Director,  
EarthRights International

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Of course, we don't, which is lucky for those who profit from it. The brainwashing we so feared in the '50s is now more a reality than ever. Every Orwellian prophecy has come true, but Big Brother is that hip corporate figurehead with all the cool gear, not (apparently) the government. We have more choices than we can imagine, except one: the choice not to consume.

**Christopher Bull**  
Worcester, Mass.

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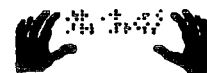
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impersonal objective reporting of most print journalism. "TV is a more emotional medium," he says, "and progressive issues do involve emotions."

In last winter's *American Prospect*, Robert Putnam, director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, examines what he has dubbed the "bowling alone" phenomenon. Americans no longer join clubs, attend meetings, or participate in civic activities in the numbers we once did. Membership in "the PTA, the Elks club, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, labor unions, and even bowling leagues" has declined by 25 to 50 percent over the last 20 to 30 years, he writes. From 1973 to 1993, the number of Americans who attended rallies or speeches dropped 36 percent; those who attended town or school meetings fell by 39 percent; and the number who worked for a political party declined by 56 percent. Analysts who have studied this epidemic of civic indifference blame it on a host of factors, including family breakups, suburban isolation and longer working hours. But Putnam fingers television.

"Americans who came of age during the Depression and World War II have been far more deeply engaged in the life of their communities than the generations that have followed them," Putnam wrote. They belong to almost twice as many civic associations, vote almost twice as often, read the newspapers almost three times as frequently. And they didn't grow up with television, unlike every new generation since the 1950s. The more people tune in, meanwhile, the more they drop out, Putnam wrote: "Within every educational category, heavy readers are avid joiners, whereas heavy watchers are more likely to be loners." Ralph Nader's concept of civic television may be an oxymoron.

The debate that progressives should be having is whether we are better off putting our efforts into reforming television or into urging people not to watch television. But the alternative of unplugging the set receives no more serious attention on the left than it does in the rest of American culture. The campaign for unplugging the television has largely been left to lone authors and scattered parents and schoolteachers. Despite thousands of psychological studies that have documented the ill effects of watching too much television, most experts have settled for proposals to reform the programs and teach "media literacy" to children.

"What about reading to your kid?" asks Henry Labalme, executive director of TV-Free America, a small group in Washington, D.C., now in its third year. "That is the single most important thing that a parent can do to help the educational development of their young children." His group believes that the quantity of TV viewing should be treated as a more crucial issue than quality of programming. "Even if we had good TV all day, so what?" he says. "We're not exercising, we're not volunteering, we're not talking to our kids."

Many reformers scoff at the notion of eliminating TV. For one thing, they like some television programs; for another, they see little harm in letting many people zone out after a hard day at work. "In a market-driven culture people

have the freedom to make choices. They want TV," says Paul Taylor, a former reporter for the *Washington Post*. The reformers often aim, instead, to free some airtime from the commercial pressures that drive most of television. In this vein, Taylor is now promoting an intriguing idea. He has asked the networks to give the presidential candidates two to five minutes of free airtime each night during the final month of the campaign. Clinton and Dole would appear on a rotating basis and could only speak for themselves, rather than using the visual images and gimmickry of campaign commercials. "We are the only democracy that doesn't offer free airtime to the candidates," Taylor says, "and we have the lowest voting rate in the world."

Taylor's proposal has the virtue of being both simple and feasible. Perhaps five minutes a day of unadulterated Clinton or Dole would take some of the steam out of our cynicism. But I am always wary of quick fixes. For many viewers those five minutes may only provide the occasion for an extended visit to the refrigerator or bathroom. I am much more interested in TV-Free America's promotion of National TV-Turnoff Week, which was just held for the second year during the last week in April.

Labalme's small group, which has a budget of \$150,000 this year, managed to recruit an estimated 3 million people through 25,000 schools, libraries, churches and community groups to unplug the set for a week. The group mails out posters and suggestions of 101 things to do instead of watching television. The governors of Maine, Vermont and North Carolina ordered materials for every school and library in their state. The American Medical Association sponsored the mailing of posters and information kits to 20,000 elementary schools. The pope even recommended that Catholics give up TV for Lent.

Oddly enough, only two environmental groups endorsed the Turnoff: the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Student Environmental Action Coalition. This tepid showing is especially hard to account for when you consider that television is one of the most environmentally destructive machines that we have. It pumps the heart of our consumer culture and spreads it around the world. Labalme, who formerly worked as an environmental consultant, says: "Consumerism is the environmental issue for us in the next century. [Americans] are 7 percent of the world's population. We consume 30 percent of its resources. We produce more than 50 percent of its inorganic wastes."

In *The Age of Missing Information*, Bill McKibben concluded: "The relentless flood of information we receive ... does not necessarily equal an understanding of our situation. It doesn't matter if you hear constantly, night after night, about poor children or abused elders. It matters that you hear about them in some way both deep enough and complicated enough that you'll go out and do something useful." Perhaps Ralph Nader should recycle his television and urge the rest of us to do the same.

Will Nixon is a freelance writer based in New York City. He writes frequently on environmental issues.



# The trouble with televisio

I wonder when Ralph Nader finds the time to watch television. Our most peripatetic activist, who still works 80-hour weeks after 30 years of crusades, prefers a parsimonious life without credit cards, stereos or cars. Yet he owns a black-and-white television set, and he took to his manual Underwood typewriter last winter to write a column for *The Nation* urging our republic of couch potatoes to demand more civic programming on the public airwaves. "For example, it does not occur to 14 million college students that there is no thirty-minute national television program focusing on significant campus activities outside the athletic arena," he wrote. "Few workers critical of the powers-that-be seem to think there should be television and radio programs devoted to labor as there are to business. ... Imagine two-way channels specializing in consumer, labor, taxpayer, environmental, civil rights or student matters," he wrote. "Imagine the effect of a twenty-four-hour channel devoted to telling the stories of citizens, acting in concert throughout the nation and world, in all their political and human drama."

I would like to watch Nader TV. At times on public access television in Manhattan, I have seen guerrilla-media-style reports on ACT UP demonstrations, student rallies against tuition hikes and Earth Day protests on Wall Street.

More often, however, I have found television psychics, nudie talk shows and garage-band home videos. And I am not convinced that some of Nader's causes don't appear on mainstream TV, even if they show up in a milder form than he may like. The *New York Times* recently reported that nature shows have now become a hot commercial product, graduating from public television to the Discovery Channel, Turner Broadcasting, NBC and the Disney Channel. But I doubt that these shows convert viewers to cause any more stirring than nature voyeurism.

In *The Age of Missing Information*, Bill McKibben lamented that so many wondrous nature shows had still produced such mediocre environmentalism. "We'll buy dolphin-safe tuna if it doesn't cost much extra, but we won't cut back on driving and consuming electricity and doing the other things that lead to global warming, even though the world now loses as much as 5 percent of its coral reefs annually due to higher water temperatures likely caused by the greenhouse effect," he writes. TV creates wildlife stars, but it doesn't teach the basic principles of ecology. "The upshot of a nature education by television is a deep fondness for certain species and a deep lack of understanding of systems, or of the policies that destroy those systems."

In 1980, Jerry Mander published *Four Arguments*

for the Elimination of Television, in part to persuade progressives and leftists to abandon their hopes of using TV to reform society. An advertising hotshot in San Francisco in the 1960s, Mander found that after joining the environmental movement, it was surprisingly difficult to sell such messages as ecology, cultural diversity and many other values that progressives would promote. "I noticed that, unlike commercial advertising messages, many of these alternative views somehow didn't work on television. They lost body became 'flat,'" he wrote. Nature shows, rather than conveying the profound feelings that people have in the wild, wound up as animal soap operas. The evening news kept reducing substantial social movements to brief clips of protesters shouting simplistic slogans.

Many critics have blamed television's owners and producers for these failings, but Mander blamed the technology itself. The television screen lacks the scope and the fine detail of movies, so it sticks to simpler images, especially faces. Mander argues that TV will always traffic in information of "the grosser forms: sports, violence, police action, as well as quiz shows, game shows, soap opera, situation comedy and news about murder, conflict, war, power politics and charismatic leaders." Hoping that television will also cover peace, ecology, community, poetry, or even yoga, is like expecting a can opener to uncork a wine bottle. It is the wrong tool for progressive causes, he concluded, one as antithetical to progressive goals as nuclear power.

Most progressives have ignored Mander's critique. "We believe that the medium is not the message. The message is the message," says Jim Naureckas of Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a group that regularly examines the conservative biases of television. Naureckas says he would like to see more progressive messages broadcast before conceding that they don't play well on television. "TV Nation was a great show," he says. When Michael Moore confronted employers in Mexican maquiladoras, the story had more visceral impact than it would have had as told through the

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